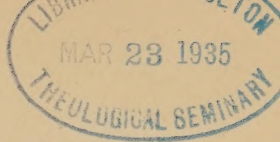


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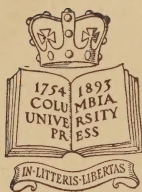
Practical Mystics of the Fourteenth Century



FRIENDS OF GOD

PRACTICAL MYSTICS OF THE
FOURTEENTH CENTURY

ANNA GROH SEESHOLTZ ✓



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TO THE
FRIENDS OF GOD
WHOM I KNOW

FOREWORD

"You enter the wilderness of the fourteenth century which is as yet inadequately charted, at least uncharted for the English-speaking world. You may lose your way following so narrow and elusive a trail as *Gottesfreunde*.—You should be able to read early German in order to find and know Eckhart, Tauler, Seuse, and others. Whatever you uncover clearly in the fourteenth century will be worth the study."

Thus, Dr. Arthur Cushman McGiffert counseled the writer when she was about to begin detailed study of the Friends of God as practical mystics.

Following courses in the history and philosophy of religion in Union Theological Seminary with Professor McGiffert and Professor Eugene V. Lyman, to whom I express true appreciation, I found profound satisfaction in hours of study of the Friends of God as individuals who achieved in their day, which was as chaotic as ours, a great measure of integration of self and a sense of direction and joy in life. Then, too, the fellowship of Friends of God, based on the idea of the friendliness of God and His universe even in a catastrophic century, was worth careful study. Their temperate combination of this-worldliness and other-worldliness, their alternation between the contemplative and active life, and especially their practicing religion in service to their fellowmen fascinated me. If they, simple folk as most of them were, and anonymous for the most part, had a wisdom for everyday living, what happened to their teaching? Why must the same truths be rediscovered in later centuries? If rediscovered, will they again be submerged, except for "the remnant" who hide these things in their hearts?

The study which follows answers some of these questions, and convinced the writer of a stream of wisdom of life running through the ages and accessible to everyone who seeks it. Moreover, this presentation of the Friends of God, practical mystics of the four-

teenth century, difficult as they were to find, is made with appreciation of them as real persons.

To Professor Rudolf Otto of Germany, I am indebted primarily for seminar hours in the study of Meister Eckhart during two semesters, 1926-1927, in the University of Marburg. Continued thought about the teachings of Meister Eckhart is a requisite for understanding the Friends of God of the Rhine valley in the fourteenth century. Professor Otto also gave direction in the selection of the German and French scholars to be followed in the intensive study.

Graduate study in Germany was made possible through a fellowship in theology, granted by the Institute of International Education.

To Rufus M. Jones, truly a friend of God and of man, I am most indebted for the original signposts marking the definite limits of the study of the Friends of God. I wish herewith to thank Professor Jones not only for his valuable studies of the mystics, but for his gracious reading of the manuscript of this book.

Professors John J. Coss and Herbert W. Schneider of Columbia University made clear the lines of research about the Friends of God in which the Department of Philosophy at Columbia University would be most interested.

To Professor Horace L. Friess, of the Department of Philosophy, Columbia University, I express deep appreciation for his scholarly thoroughness in reading the chapters of this study, thus adding greatly to the joy of writing the story of the Friends of God, practical mystics of the fourteenth century.

Permission was readily granted by the publisher, Ernst Reinhardt, München, for the use of Suso's drawing, "Ausgang und Rückkehr der Kreatur zu Gott," and the explanation thereof given in Joseph Bernhart's *Die Mystik des Mittelalters* (1922). Permission was also granted for quotations from the Explanation of Suso's drawing. Grateful acknowledgment is hereby made by the author.

ANNA GROH SEESHOLTZ

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FRIENDS OF GOD

Practical Mystics of the Fourteenth Century

CHAPTER I

THE TROUBLED TIMES

The *Divine Comedy* which begins "in hell and ends in heaven" fitly opened the century during which the Friends of God came into prominence in the Rhine valley. Dante stated as his purpose in writing his drama of life and death, "to remove those living in this life from the state of misery and lead them to the state of felicity."¹ In less dramatic way and in briefer scope, in the constant and nigh staggering changes of the fourteenth century, individuals and small groups of men and women, sure of the possibility of apprehending God, found a way from misery to bliss; they endured the "hell" of external life by shifting their attention from outer to inner life and then by inner practices they achieved foretastes of heaven. They "endured the cross" in working out their ideas and ideals for themselves and others. The way was not hidden but open; so they became prophets in the sense of teachers. These Friends of God were so much a part of the intricate stuff of life in their time that to find them one enters a vast forest, as it were, thick with undergrowth.² Some trails in this wilderness have been clearly marked by later scholarship. "The greatness of this age," says D'Aygalliers, "consisted in conceiving reforms: preparing freedom; its calamity in being unable to translate into facts its bold and generous dreams."³ In this century begun by Dante and known to most secondary school pupils as the age of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, the Friends of God in the German provinces were in quiet persistent ways actualizing their dreams.

¹ Dante, *Epistola a Cangrande*, in Dunbar, H. Flanders, *Symbolism in Medieval Thought*, p. 156.

² *Une vaste forêt, d'une vitalité puissante mais particulièrement toul-fue*. Pourrat, P., *La Spiritualité Chrétienne, Le Moyen Âge*, Vol. II, Preface.

³ D'Aygalliers, A. Wautier, *Ruysbroeck, the Admirable*, p. 14.

Along the Rhine, to this day a river of great social significance, the tumult of life in the fourteenth century was tremendous. The legends of the castle fortresses and the novels of knights and ladies, of troubadours and jesters have too often given the gentle and romantic phases of life, and omitted the fierce reality of the disturbing and destroying feuds and wars for the control of lands so that the few might feast in spacious halls while the many, in crooked houses crowded against the fortified hills, starved. True, conditions in this century were somewhat improved over the preceding one. Though robbers and hired assassins made dangerous the Roman roads on either side of the Rhine,⁴ along the same roads had come the returning crusaders, knights and wealthy burghers, exhilarated with having discovered a new world. Merchants, too, mostly Lombards and Jews, traveled those roads often with bodyguards, but at the same time they acquired the culture of the knights and ladies, and secured seats in the city councils as well. The tales they told of the world beyond the town's limits were repeated by the town's folks. The artisans with their guilds and guildhalls made for the dignity and prosperity of those social groups.⁵ They too had trade regulations and their feuds. The knights might have their swords, but the artisans had fists, sticks, and stones. "The giant people" along the Rhine as well as in Western Europe generally was moving "with starts and upheavals," and now and then with convulsions.⁶

In the large prosperous walled cities⁷ such as Cologne, Mainz,

⁴ Old Roman roads ran from Basel to Mainz; from Metz to Strassburg and on to Augsburg and Salzburg; also from Constance to Augsburg. The most important road was to the left of the Rhine from Augsburg to Basel via Strassburg, Speier, Worms to Mainz on to Bingen, on to Cologne (Colonia Agrippina). To the right was an old road from Mainz to Baden-Baden. See Baum, Julius, *Die schöne deutsche Stadt*.

⁵ The weavers as early as 1099 in Mainz had their unions, with religious as well as economic purpose. They had greatly increased in number since the middle of the twelfth century. Often they had their own chapels.

⁶ D'Aygalliers, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁷ One cannot speak of town life in Germany before the eleventh century; "dann ist es plötzlich da," "Stattluft macht frei" (Town air brings freedom) was a common saying. Baum, J., *op. cit.*, p. 5.

Strassburg, were centered the archbishoprics, bishoprics, and secular clergy. In the isolated hill towns and their environs were many monasteries for men and women;⁸ there were also Augustinian hermits off the highways. In the cities and in the country, where the simple-hearted, ignorant peasants lived under feudal control, were the Dominican preaching friars and the Franciscan brothers of the poor. In both these orders were burghers' sons. From 1250 on, there had been marked increase not only in monastic "regulars" but in the membership of the tertiaries who were lay men and women under monastic rules. The organization of lay people must have been a powerful social force, especially in the cultivation of group spirit among the merchants, artisans, and workingmen. It has been referred to by Ave de Barine as one of the forces leading to the disintegration of the feudal system.⁹ Machiavelli is quoted by Rufus Jones as saying that men like St. Francis and St. Dominic "saved religion but destroyed the church." Be that as it may, the mendicant orders were popular with the people of all classes, and their strength is attested not only by such prominent Franciscan tertiaries as Dante, Columbus, Raphael, Michelangelo, but by the tens of thousands of the laity, many of whom took and kept the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The wandering mendicant preachers taught the people in their own dialects and they taught of practical, interesting matters. Nikolaus von Bibra expressed in satire the popular demand: *Wiederholt ihr das alte so muss auch neues bei, oder euer Rede ist nichts wert* (When repeating the old, add something new, else your speech is good for nothing). The historian, Hauck, emphasizes the tremendous impression made by these "open air" preachers by quoting Roger Bacon who said of Berthold von Regensburg, the great Franciscan preacher of the thirteenth century, that in his twenty years of preaching he had accomplished more than all the other minorites put together.¹⁰

⁸ Ascetic ideas had since the eleventh century an effect of increasing cloisters for women.

⁹ Ave de Barine in *Revue des deux mondes*, 1891, p. 782, quoted by Rufus Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, chap. ix.

¹⁰ Hauck, *A. Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands*, Vol. V. Nikolaus von Bibra quoted, p. 327. Roger Bacon quoted, p. 345.

The presence of so many religious in this brisk changing social life of the Rhine valley combined with the determined effort on the part of the Papal See to tighten and extend ecclesiastical jurisdiction gave rise to the name *Pfaffen-Gasse* (Priests' Lane) for the Rhine. The Rhine valley has also been referred to as *die geistige Schlagader des deutschen Reiches* (the spiritual artery of the German kingdom).¹¹ This was the river along whose shores appeared from the middle of the twelfth century through the fourteenth century, what Pourrat calls *une si belle floraison mystique*.¹² Here in particular, as was general in medieval Europe, the great unifying social force had been the Roman Catholic Church, ready for every event in the life of the people from birth to death and beyond. She furnished regulations for conduct of business, as well as place and leaders for drama and the many folk festivals. She offered instruction and compelled attendance at church in order to control social conduct and to direct personal piety. With rites and ceremonies she attended birth, marriage, and death of all the people; "Christianity was the official life program."¹³

For the Church to cover all of western Europe with administrative strength centered in Rome was a gigantic task which was becoming impossible as the nations, French, German, and English, were growing self-conscious and desirous of self-government. Distances made impossible the control of the manners and morals of her secular clergy. The people were murmuring against unworthy and idle priests, especially those who wore fine and colored woolen garments. As Huizinga¹⁴ points out, the religious temper of the people showed "violent contradictions"; "spiteful jests at the expense of the incontinent monk and the guzzling priest" were made by the very people who believed that the sacraments were essential in life. Prophets and prophetesses had appeared along the Rhine in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The intellectual nuns like Herrads von Landsperg, Hildegard von Bing-

¹¹ Böhringer, Frederick, *Die Kirchechristi und ihre Zeugen*, p. 8.

¹² Pourrat, P., *op. cit.*, p. 120.

¹³ *Historisches Jahrbuch im Auftrage der Görresgesellschaft*, I, 8.

¹⁴ Huizinga, J., *The Waning of the Middle Ages*; tr. from Dutch, chap. xiii.

en, Elizabeth von Schönau (all of whom had protested against evils of the Church administrators and clergy) had been *Erscheinungen* (phenomena) not forgotten by the people; the young Elizabeth of Hungary and Thuringia, practically made a saint by the harshness of the churchman Konrad of Marburg, was a favorite heroine; Mechthild von Magdeburg, famous Beguine of the thirteenth century, was not only known and loved by nuns, but was quoted by friars and wandering preachers in sermons to the people. Reforming sects, such as the Cathari and Waldensians, had appeared before the fourteenth century in Germany. The latter centered in Strassburg; they were all through Alsace and Bavaria; some of them, as wandering preachers, were received into the homes of the people. To quote the German historian Hauck, "by the middle of the thirteenth century there appears for the first time (in German provinces) the juxtaposition (*das Nebeneinander*) of Church and heresy as indicative of the general situation."¹⁵ He reports that a recluse in Bronnbach asked a visiting abbot, "Who knows if there is a God or angels or blessed ones with Him, and what the kingdom of God is? Who has come from there and told us of it?" And when the abbot argued with her, she answered, 'What I do not see, I do not believe.'"

Thus the people were discussing openly matters once confined to scholarly disputes, such as, if an immoral priest made ineffective the sacraments; if confession to such a person were in order; if there were a purgatory; if infant baptism were essential; if one could pray as acceptably in bed as in chapel or pray in one's mind without voice or motion of lips;¹⁶ if poverty were really a virtue, if St. Francis' "stigmata" were fact or allegory, and so on. One of the oldest and most famous of folk books, *Meister Lucidanus* (manuscript copies of which date back to the fourteenth century), is filled with fantastic speculations concerning God, man, and the world. "The new thought" already suspected¹⁷ by

¹⁵ Hauck, *op. cit.*, IV, 852. Recluse story, p. 900.

¹⁶ *Sed mente orare sufficiat sine voce vel motu labionum*. Mosheim comments, "This is a common sentence of those who wish to be called mystics." In Mosheim, *De Beghardis et Beguinabus*, edited by Martini, p. 328.

¹⁷ Scotus Erigena's book on predestination had been condemned by churchmen in 859. At a Synod of Churchmen, Paris, 1209 or 1210, when

the Church in the writings of Scotus Erigena, the bold independent scholar of the ninth century, and of men like Amaury (Almarich) de Bene and David of Dinant in the late twelfth century, who seemed to the Church to reiterate ideas expressed by the former, had by the fourteenth century filtered down into the common mind and "was being changed from academic truths to practical truths." As Rufus Jones expresses it, "these ideas began to be translated from the safe place in books into the dangerous stuff of human life."¹⁸ By the close of the fourteenth century John Gerson (1363-1429), prominent in church affairs and Chancellor of the University of Paris, wrote a treatise *contra vanam curiositatem* in which he speaks of the extreme religious beliefs of the people as proceeding from the "melancholy imagination of man."¹⁹

At the same time that these heretical and reforming ideas were disturbing society, the pope and his court were distraught by struggles concerning the priority of general church councils or of the papal court in matters of polity and doctrine. What was still more disrupting was that the struggle for temporal power had become acute again at the turn of the century. The quarrel with Philip, the Fair, of France concerning his divorce and political intrigues led Pope Boniface VIII in 1302 to issue the bull *Unam sanctam*, which is termed "the classic medieval expression of the papal claims to universal temporal power."²⁰ This quarrel led directly to the Babylonian Captivity (1309-1377) when the popes held court and residence in Avignon. Furthermore, the German electorate,²¹ consisting of three great ecclesiastics and four

writings of Amaury and David of Dinant were condemned, Scotus Erigena's were mentioned as the source of Amaury's heresies. When in 1215 (Lateran Council) Amaury's writings were again condemned, Scotus Erigena was not mentioned. Aristotle's natural philosophy was put under interdict by Bull of Gregory IX, 1231.

¹⁸ Jones, Rufus, *op. cit.*, chap. xi. Brotherhood groups.

¹⁹ *Ex sola hominum phantasiatione et melancholica imaginatione.* Quoted in Huizinga. *op. cit.*, p. 139.

²⁰ Ogg, *Source Book of Medieval History*, p. 385.

²¹ "Archbishops of Mainz, Trier, and Cologne; the King of Bohemia, the Margrave of Brandenburg, the Duke of Saxony, and the Count Palatine of the Rhine."—*Ibid.*, p. 409.

powerful provincial rulers, in 1314 elected two kings, Louis (Ludwig) of Bavaria and Frederick of Austria; and the popes had finally to take some position in the matter, since the German king was emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and expected consecration by the pope. When the old French scholar, Bishop of Avignon and also a cardinal, was elected pope in 1316, he, as John XXII, busied himself with politics, art, and science as well as dogmatic questions. Political divisions in the German provinces were for the time being to his advantage. But when Louis of Bavaria had defeated his rival at Mühldorf in 1322 and asked for coronation, "Papa" John XXII declared him unworthy of the office of king and emperor, and declared him the protector of heretics. He gave him three months to reform. As the ensuing struggle between the Pope and the German king continued for twenty years and more, not only were clergy involved by the conflicting orders from pope and king (to both of whom they owed obedience) but the people were by papal interdicts deprived of all church services—of the very sacraments which gave to birth, life and death some hope. City magistrates ordered services to be resumed and the clergy who would not obey were to leave the city. Actual rioting in which citizens took part occurred frequently. Thus the Church theoretically identical with the people had also "starts and upheavals" and destructive convulsions of her own.

Added to all this was "the terror of nature" caused by earthquakes, fires, floods, locusts, famines, and the appearance in Western Europe about the middle of the century of the Black Death. So common was death that the old chronicles simply recorded that in such and such years there was "great dying" which lasted so long and so many persons died. It is estimated that in this century one-fourth of the population of Europe died from this terrible disease.

Death was the common leveler of social and of all other distinctions. "A poor beggar here in life may have no one for a friend but death will be his friend. He takes him in with the rich."²² There were some persons who met the terrible experiences

²² Döring-Hirsch, *Tod and Jenseits im Spätmittelalter*, p. 76.

of life with a certain hilariousness, as if to wring out of life while it lasted what joy and fun they could. The fear of death was ever present to most. There are records (but no details that I have found) concerning ecclesiastical fraternities of fools, "founded to combat the fear of death," for instance—"The Company of the Fool" of Aarau under the patronage of the plague saint, St. Sebastian, and the Virgin. The end of the world seemed near as prophesied by various individuals. To most persons, the plague seemed divine punishment "because the ways of humanity were inhuman, and we men did not love our neighbors; all our doings turned towards luxuriant living." Nohl in his study, *The Black Death*, states that this opinion found particular support in the Church.²³ "Prayers and vows were the two main spiritual means of combating the fear of death." Medical men were not idle; they gave instructions. Those who did not hold themselves responsible for the plague, spread reports that the Jews had poisoned the wells; in some cases, the Jews were believed to be the instruments of God. One can scarcely imagine the excitability of the mass of illiterate people as revealed in their sudden extreme actions. During the worst epidemic of the century (1349-1352) the Jews were sought out and burned in specially prepared wooden enclosures in the graveyards. Böhringer quotes an old Strassburg chronicle:

There must have been two thousand . . . those who would consent to baptism, they let live. Many young children for their mothers' and fathers' sakes were taken out of the fire and were baptized; and whatever one owed the Jews, was all squared. . . .²⁴

As Nohl states in *The Black Death* (p. 193),

it is astounding to see the frankness with which the chroniclers sometimes express themselves on the true reasons which led to the extermination of the Jews. Honest Fritsche actually calls the money of the Jews, "the poison which brought their death."

²³ Nohl, J., *The Black Death* (1926), p. 123. See also Belloc, Hillaire, *A History of England*, Vol. III. The Black Death is considered to be the close of one period and the beginning of another in English history.

²⁴ Quoted by Böhringer, *Die Kirche Christi und ihre Zeugen*, XVII, 44.

An old Strassburg chronicler, Michael Kleinlawel (1348) recorded,

When sixteen thousand died
The citizens did much incline
To measures elsewhere tried.
Three masters stoutly did resist.

.
The people to the Münster (cathedral) trooped
The masters soon must yield
And on the Jews they quickly swooped. . . .
And on one day were burnt to naught
Two hundred or nearby.²⁵

And for a whole century, according to a resolution of the Strassburg city council, no Jews should be allowed to settle in the city. One is not surprised that the humanist, Boccaccio, in his *Decameron*, denounced the hatred and persecution of the Jews.²⁶

The flagellants or self-scourgers (called *penitentes* in Latin, and *geisler* and *kreuzbrüder* in German), who had appeared as early as 1260, in the fourteenth century went through the German provinces in a zealous effort to avert the vengeance of God as expressed in the Black Death.²⁷ Often they stirred the people against the Jews. They wore blouses with red crosses on back and breast and carried the penitent's rod. Usually they entered a church for prayer, then in the open space in front of the church, they scourged themselves, prostrated themselves thrice in the form of a cross, whipped each other, sang cries for mercy and invited the onlookers to join in singing the prayers and songs of penitence. Often they remained on their knees until a priest gave them absolution. Many onlookers, sometimes thousands, joined the wandering group, which usually stayed about a town for a week. There was some effort made by flagellants, who were largely laity, to form a new religious order with papal sanction. But Pope Clem-

²⁵ Nohl, *op. cit.*, quoted, pp. 183-184.

²⁶ "The same greed for money however soon induced the towns and princes to recall the Jews. . . . By the Golden Bull of 1355 Charles IV permitted the princes to 'keep Jews.'"—Nohl, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-196.

²⁷ For more detailed description see Förstemann, Ernst, *Die Christlichen Geiszlgesellschaften*. D'Aygaliers, *op. cit.*, pp. 49, 51.

ent VI issued a bull against them in 1349, and made some allusion to their attitude toward the Jews. This phenomenon, however, re-appeared in various parts of Germany about 1372.²⁸

Then there was the "dance madness." This appeared in the last third of the century. In 1373-1374, bands of "dancing and singing" men and women came from Germany to the dedication of a church in Aix-la-Chapelle. Dancing had been the usual recreation at church festivals. Priests and monks could participate. Popular festivals linked up with the Church. In folk songs, paradise was pictured as a garden where all were merry, where angels danced and sang. In an old "mystic hymn" Jesus was the leader of the dance.

Da hört man süß erklingen
ir vögeli geton
und auch die engel singen
ir melodie gar schön
Da füert Jesus den tanze
mit aller megde schar.²⁹

(There [in heaven] one hears sweet songs of birds in harmony, angels too sing fine melodies; Jesus there leads off the dance with all the maiden host.)

But the *tanzwut* (dance mania) was something other than merry. It was the madness of dancing for days and nights, sometimes on St. John's night, or in honor of St. Vitus. Stories spread of how priests ordered the dancers to stop; they did not. The priests would then say, "May God and Saint Magnus cause you to dance for one whole year"; and so it happened. One man tried to rescue his sister by pulling her out of the dance; he tore off her arm but she did not bleed and continued dancing. At the end of the year they were given absolution, some died (ten men and one woman), others slept day and night. Some folk said these people had to dance because the sacrament of baptism had been administered by bad priests. Some folk said that the dancers wanted money only. And many, many sermons, as old manuscripts of early

²⁸ Lea, H. C., *History of the Inquisition*, II, 384. For dancing mania, p. 393.

²⁹ Döring-Hirsh, *op. cit.*, p. 60. Throughout this study the writer is responsible for the translations, except when otherwise indicated.

fifteenth century show, were preached against the sin of dancing.³⁰

Death as the gate to hell or the entrance to heaven became more and more a popular obsession; "the art of dying," "three kinds of spiritual dying," "the remorse after death of the sinner," and the like, became popular themes. Some of the "German mystics" tried to counteract the horror of death by directing attention to the passion of Jesus, or to the present need of inner dying to self in order to gain heaven. Catholic doctrine generally distinguished between "physical death" and "spiritual death," and there was the second death "eternal damnation." In the rituals for the sick of the fourteenth century were the so-called "Anselm questions";³¹ among them was: "Do you believe that our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, dies for you?" "I believe." "Do you thank Him?" "I thank Him." "Do you believe that you will not be saved except through His death?" "I believe." Books concerning the art of dying were written by scholars. For instance, there was one by John Gerson (already referred to as the Chancellor of the University of Paris). The fate of the body interested the common people as shown in verse-fragments in which they refer to the "toads and serpents eagerly waiting for the body." It was also a common idea in the Middle Ages that the bodies of some saints never decayed. Many looked upon death as a journey; so they prayed for escorts like St. Michael or "the pure Virgin Mary." Heaven was spoken of as home where angels and all the holy ones were. Death at the chessboard was an increasingly popular idea from 1300 on. In the Strassburg Cathedral there was at this time a picture of Death at a chessboard; the onlookers were persons of every social class. When the first representations were made, they were more cadaverous than the skeleton form, popularized later in Holbein's woodcuts. There was a thirteenth-century French story of three noblemen meeting three hideous dead

³⁰ *Was schaden tantzen bringt*—"One who has danced has lost all chances for salvation unless he confesses, repents, and will not do it again. . . . Dancing is the devil's tool. Also all who stand by and look on are the devil's servants."—Vetter, *Lehrliteratur des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts*, pp. 277-282.

³¹ Falk, F., *Die deutsche Sterbebüchlein von der ältesten Zeit des Buchdruckes bis zum Jahre 1520*. Quoted in Döring-Hirsch, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

men; also a legend of three kings meeting ancestors who repeated an old, old verse used often as an epitaph:

As you are now so were we once
As we are now, you will become.

It is also of importance to note from the point of view of instruction to laity that about this time appeared statues like "Dame World" and "Worldly Princes" above church portals; there were such for example both in Strassburg and Basel. In front these statues were beautiful; on the back, these statues represented the bodies as being eaten by snakes. Moral teachings were combined with the idea of death, for example—the keeping of the Ten Commandments would open paradise.³²

The Church in the struggle over the election of the German king and emperor had seen fit to use as a weapon the interdict forbidding not only the regular services but also the administering of the sacraments. This great consolation in life and death was removed from the people. But in the misery of the times and the resulting panic of the people, the Church made use of the dependence of the people on angels and saints and images of the same by instituting the office of the Fourteen Auxiliary Saints (abolished after the Council of Trent). By prayer to these "all those who in need invoke their help, shall obtain the salutary fulfillment of their prayers" through the grace of God.³³ Even the seeing of the image of a saint on a church-front or at the crossroads seemed to make life more bearable. Familiar figures of saints "produced the same sort of reassuring effect as the sight of a policeman in a foreign city."³⁴

³² Döring-Hirsch, *op. cit.*, p. 80:

"Doch sind die zehen Gebot ons gäben,
Von unserem Gott ins Ewig läben.
Wölcher an denselben gloubt mit Flysz,
Wirt kommen in das Paradysz."

Also

"Das alles wirt an den werken hangen,
Die in diser welt sind begangen."

"Heaven is for the pious; the wicked will end in the fire."

³³ Huizinga, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

There was a common belief in guardian angels. Miracles could happen daily both to clergy, nuns, and laity.³⁵ The cult of the Church was further intensified through contemplation of the Passion and Death of Jesus, and through prayers to the Virgin, His Holy Mother. Relics were looked upon almost as magic though there is a record that the Lord told St. Gertrude of Helfta that "the worthiest relics on earth are my words."³⁶ Church bells were rung at all hours: often they announced approaching death to call the priest, were rung at death, and while the procession approached and left the church, and during burial. Religious pilgrimages gave the impression of constant movement and of something new coming to town! Hundreds of persons, sometimes thousands, wandered. Then there were wandering preachers (besides the mendicant friars). Venturinus of Bergama, "a miracle" or "wonderman," came through German provinces preaching repentance. Throngs crowded about him. Some of his converts adopted the penitent's garment which he had designed.³⁷ Weddings and wedding bells followed burials. Near the beginning of Huizinga's thorough study of "the autumn of the Middle Ages," he gives the following picture:

So violent and motley was life that it bore the mixed smell of blood and roses. The men of that time always oscillate between the fear of hell and the most naïve joy, between cruelty and tenderness, between harsh asceticism and insane attachment

³⁵ Story of Sister Adelheid von Offingen who was sent from church to the kitchen to prepare food for guests. "As she was going into the kitchen, it was winter and much snow had fallen. As she heard the sound of the bell which is rung at the time of the elevation of the Host, she knelt in the snow and at the very place, appeared beautiful grass as if it were summer when the grass is most beautiful."—Wilms, Hieronymus, O. P., *Das Beten der Mystikerinnen*, chap. iii.

³⁶ Huizinga (*op. cit.*, p. 150) refers to one crowd of worshippers around St. Elizabeth of Hungary (+1231), who tore off strips of linen, cut off hair, etc., for relics. In 1392 King Charles VI of France on the occasion of a solemn feast distributed the ribs of his ancestor, Saint Louis, to Pierre d'Ailly and others. Above reference to St. Gertrude, in Preger, *Geschichte der deutschen Mystik*, I, 129.

³⁷ Förstemann, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

to the delights of this world, between hatred and goodness, always running to extremes.³⁸

Huizinga writes in another chapter of "the immense sadness" and "confessed pessimism" of this time and concludes, "still this very pessimism is the ground whence their soul will soar up to the aspiration of a life of beauty and serenity."³⁹

For a people so harassed, the regular orders even with their lay members (in the "third order") provided insufficient refuge, especially for the woman. There were fewer men than women in the fourteenth century, probably due to continuous local feuds, dangers of traveling when on business, the increasing number of celibates; an apprentice could not as a rule marry while learning his trade; and again, the records show greater mortality among men than among women during pest years. The convents for women, contrary to the custom in men's mendicant orders, were reserved for the most part for daughters of well-to-do patricians, many of whom sent their daughters as children to the convent sisters and paid liberally for their education and care.⁴⁰ Records show that a woman sometimes brought valuable manuscripts. The rules for the "third order" were severe. According to the *Bulle super montem* (fourteenth century) of Pope Nicolas IV for the Franciscan tertiaries, one had to hold to the faith of the Apostles and the Church; one could not leave the tertiary order, i.e., return to the world; one could enter into the "regular convent life."

In these circumstances, it became a very common custom for lay women (often widows) to live together in a town house. Or they lived in groups in a common compound. It was coöperative living; they wore simple clothes and did their own work; they sewed, cared for the sick, were asked to be extra mourners; they had daily religious meetings and were, for the most part, good simple persons. Sometimes women of the nobility would establish and endow a group of houses, most commonly called *beguinages* in the Low Countries; in Germany the houses were *Gotteshäuser*. There

³⁸ Huizinga's book in German bears the title, *Herbst des Mittelalters* (1st ed., 1919). Above is from English translation by F. Hopman, p. 18.

³⁹ Huizinga, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁴⁰ Bücher, Carl, *Die Frauenfrage im Mittelalter*.

were no general regulations.⁴¹ Some exceedingly poor women were wont to wander the streets calling, "Bread in the name of God—bread!" It must be remembered that the mendicant orders, especially the Franciscans dignified poverty and made almsgiving a virtue. The women were called Beguines. It is generally agreed that a priest of Liège, Lambert de Becque, had formed the first group. Women doing philanthropic work had always been connected with the Church. Some scholars think the word Beguine came from an old word *beggen* meaning to beg, just as Lollards from *lollen*. Others speak of St. Begge. Beghards, groups of lay men engaged in similar activities and living together also developed. The date and place of their origin are unknown. It is enough to note here that the rapid development of these groups was considered by Mathew of Paris "one of the marvels of the age."⁴²

We have evidence that the secular clergy were jealous of the popularity of Beguines and Beghards and asked the Church authorities to proceed against them, in that such organized groups were contrary to ecclesiastical law. As early as 1244 the Archbishop of Mainz had tried to regulate the number by ordering that no one under forty should be received into a *beguinage*. Similar laws were passed again and again. In 1310 in Mainz a law forbade "the wretched starvelings" to walk the streets crying "Bread!" Albertus Magnus of Cologne in 1260 had written against all groups without much distinction.⁴³ By 1306, for example, Heinrich von Virneborg, Franciscan, the Archbishop of Cologne, determined to get rid of them. He reproached them for practicing a new kind of life under pretext of poverty, for begging instead of working,

⁴¹ They had all the advantages of the nuns without the severity of the three-fold vow. "Society of demi-nuns," R. Jones calls them. In Bruges, Belgium, one can visit a *beguinage*, and meet modern Beguines. The church in their compound was founded in 1245, and rebuilt in 1665. The Beguines live in groups in separate houses and are obedient to a superior whom they elect. More than a dozen other *beguinages* are in Belgium.

⁴² Mathew of Paris, English monk, wrote the history of his country and foreign relations from 1233-1273.

⁴³ Albertus Magnus, *Liber manualis* (1260), called "a sort of inquisitorial formulary." D'Aygalliers, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

for breaking all laws because of their belief that they, being led by the Spirit of God, were under no law.

They think and dream over the great question of moral perfection; they fondly imagine themselves free from sin . . . they call themselves, "the perfected" and "apostles."⁴⁴

It is probable that Duns Scotus (+ 1308), Franciscan, may have been sent to Cologne in 1307 to help the clergy with the situation. Jundt, in describing religious heresy and free thought in western Germany at this time, points to its prevalence in the urban centers of increasing middle class activity and prosperity.⁴⁵

The first account which we have of the burning of a Beguine is that of Marguerite de Hainault, better known as Marguerite Porrette, or *la Porete*.⁴⁶ She had written a book containing the following: "the Soul that has annihilated itself in the love of its creator can accord to nature everything it desires." A Jew was burned at the same time, May, 1310, in Paris. Marguerite's book had been condemned before 1305 by the Bishop of Cambrai. This did not keep her from teaching; she sent her book to the Bishop of Chalons. Before her death, she was kept for eighteen months in an inquisitorial dungeon in Paris. The university "canonists" agreed on May 30 that she was a relapsed heretic; she was burned the next day by order of the provost of Paris. In 1330 Pope John XXII condemned the Beghards and Beguines for teaching that "in our souls is that which is uncreated by God"; that God is neither good nor bad, but not even the best; and what is so much worse, they taught that to say God is good is just as if one called white, black.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *Contra Begardos et Begardas, apostolorum nomine se vulgo insinuantés novamque sub umbra paupertatis religionem similes.* . . . — Mosheim, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

⁴⁵ Jundt, *Histoire du panthéisme populaire au moyen âge et au seizième siècle*, p. 36.

⁴⁶ Mosheim, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

⁴⁷ Mosheim, *op. cit.*, p. 283. Also pp. 333 ff. The document of condemnation, 1366, of Metza of Westhoven, Beguine, is one of the most illuminating. The stubbornness of the woman! "That you Metza of Westhoven after the sentence made against you by the Venerable in Christ, father and master Johannus of good memory . . . and after you

There had been sects in the Rhine valley with whom the original Beguines and Beghards were constantly confused. Though the Church made fine distinctions as to how hostile sects departed from orthodoxy in their beliefs, they did not make fine distinctions as to how the various suspected sects differed. In the early thirteenth century, there had been Ortlubiens in Strassburg, whose founder Ortlieb had appropriated the teachings of Amaury de Bene and the Almaricians who were opposed by the Church a hundred years before. Amaury (+ 1206) of the University of Paris had taught "that every Christian is bound to believe that he is a member of Christ and that he can share the sufferings of Christ himself." A church synod of Paris in 1209 had destroyed his writings and followers, and had his bones dug up and dishonored.⁴⁸ Apocalyptic ideas also appeared in the teachings of the Ortlubiens, and in this they resembled the Joachimites of northern Italy, whose founder Joachim of Floris (+ 1202) had taught that since the Church had fallen into irremediable corruptions, the terrible punishment from God was due; that Moses and Elijah would return to earth in the Dominican and Franciscan orders.

There were sporadic appearances of The White Brothers (1324 and later) who boasted of divine revelations. *Winkeliers* and *Grubenheimers* also appeared in the German states in the fourteenth century. Among them were "perfected ones." The Waldensians, already referred to, were also found scattered in all parts of German states. They were reformers and moralists, often called simply "the good people." They had apostles and among them a *collegium* of those who were great among them, related, ac-

repentant retracted the denial of all heresies against you relapsed into the first errors just as a dog returning to vomit," . . . etc. Language also showed extremes. In 1336 (Mosheim, *op. cit.*, p. 237) the Bishop of Magdeburg arrested certain women, detained them in prison until "they seemed to return to sanity," then freed them. Döring-Hirsch, *op. cit.*, reports that onlookers attended burnings and other persecutions sometimes to exhort the victims to repentance and sometimes to console them.

⁴⁸ "Neither Amaury nor David of Dinant (writings condemned at same time) had any idea of the far-reaching effects of their doctrine"; their followers "were better logicians."—D'Aygaliers, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

according to the historian Keller, to the later groups of Friends of God.⁴⁹

In southern France the Beghards were often called by mistake, *Fraticelli*,⁵⁰ and similarly in northern France, in the Low Countries, and in Germany, the Beguines and Beghards were confused with another sect, the Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit. The Ortlubiens of Strassburg were first called The Brothers of the New Spirit, and it is probable that they formed the nucleus for Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit. In 1317, John of Ochsenstein of Strassburg wrote a letter⁵¹ of instruction to an inquisitorial commission, which is our best evidence of the Church's thinking about The Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit: Some persons calling themselves begging sisters and brothers, also Brothers and Sisters of Voluntary Poverty, among whom to our great sorrow are monks and priests and married persons. We condemn all the doctrines and ceremonies of the sect. We order that these heretics be chased from their habitations, that the houses used for their meetings be sold publicly for the profit of the Church, that their books be sent to priests within fifteen days and burned. All not repenting within three days are to be excommunicated, as well as all persons giving them alms. Those who accept the vows of Franciscan tertiaries are to be excused, or those now under the direction of Brothers of orders, approved by the Church. The Beguines of pious character are also to be excused. These persons are condemned because they claim to be God in virtue of their nature, without distinction; because they claim man can be so united to God that his power, will and activity do not differ from God's, and that each perfect man is a Christ and can acquire merit greater than that of Christ. Among them are persons who claim to be more perfect than St. Paul or the Virgin herself. A perfect man need not obey the commandments of God, even the one respecting

⁴⁹ Keller, *Die Reformation und die älteren Reformparteien*, chap. i. See also Lea, *History of the Inquisition*, I, 85.

⁵⁰ *Fraticelli* used in an opprobrious sense in Tuscany. They practiced poverty outside the convent and believed more or less in man as an incarnation of the Holy Spirit. See Jones, R., *op. cit.*, chap. viii.

⁵¹ Mosheim, *op. cit.*, pp. 256 ff.

parents; accordingly, he need not obey prelates or statutes of the Church. They do not venerate the body of Christ. . . . Every honest layman can consecrate the elements for Holy Communion. They say that a priest when he has laid aside his sacred garments has lost all particular power and resembles a sack out of which the wheat has been turned. Confession to a priest is not necessary for salvation. There is no hell, no purgatory and no last judgment. Man is judged only at the moment of his death. Then his spirit will return whither it came—to God and for all eternity. No one will be damned, not even the Jews or Saracens because at death their spirit returns to God. The Scriptures contain poetic passages in which one need not look for truth. And such degree of perfection is possible that one can neither advance nor fail. Such a one cannot sin. All property is common to all; so stealing is no sin. "They hold themselves immovable on the summit of the ninth rock."⁵² Such a perfected one is free from the need of virtues, free from Christ, free from God himself.

In the twentieth century some may scan these beliefs with interest and perhaps sympathetic amusement. I suggest that certain present-day social phenomena may be a working out of individual freedom and group freedom with some resemblance to the Free Spirits as reported above by their opponents. Even in the fourteenth century, interested as the Christians were in winning salvation and assurance of heaven, such independent thinking and acting were more than lawless; they were blasphemous!

The Friends of God held beliefs of union with God, withdrawal from outer forms, progress toward perfection—even to the summit of the ninth rock. But they preached in no uncertain terms against the Free Spirits, defining the difference between the true and false Friends of God. The margin between freedom and license is narrow.

Because of continuous persecution in many places, the Free Spirits were driven underground, so to speak. Many stories spread

⁵² Referring to a treatise earlier than Rulman Merswin's *Book of the Nine Rocks*. This early anonymous treatise was attributed to Suso for a long time.

of their secret meetings. Many stories of extravagant freedom ending in ugly and immoral ways were probably true. There was, however, another tendency among them, an ascetic and moral one, but this they had in common with other groups. The article in the *Dictionnaire de theologie Catholique*, Vol. VI, col. 802, speaks of the influence of the sect as ended *par la grande convulsion de 1525* (Reformation); and it classes under Free Spirit Sect, all societies which have in common "pantheistic, quietistic, illuministic theories and a theory of freedom to cover immoral and unsocial doctrines." Records are available of the persecution of the Brothers of the Free Spirit throughout the fourteenth century. D'Aygaliers suggests that in the latter part of the century The Men of Intelligence, of Brussels, were doubtless of the same movement. They showed the two tendencies—ascetic and libertine—and were stamped out in 1411 by the Inquisition.⁵³

The Church's way of proceeding against the heretics by bans, interdicts, bulls, burnings, drownings, only added to the terror of life. As a rule, it took coöperation with local magistrates to complete the process of getting rid of a heretic. Medieval German municipal law codes like *Sachsenspiegel* (Mirror of Saxony) and *Schwabenspiegel* (of Bavaria) recognized the jurisdiction of bishops over heretics and provided for death by burning. The Inquisition, intended to be an instrument of justice insuring trial, only gradually became effective in German provinces. Individual inquisitors were appointed, as Nicholaus of Strassburg for the examination of Meister Eckhart in 1327, or Friar John Schandeland sent by the Pope in 1353 to exterminate Beghards, etc. Members of the Dominican order, founded at the time of the prevalence of Albigenses in southern France to conserve the faith and to teach the Church doctrines, were often made responsible for heresy proceedings.

In this century the Franciscans were divided sharply on the question of the nature of their vow of poverty. Pope John XXII endeavored to end their dissensions, but without success. He had difficulty with Franciscan scholars, especially Marsilius of Padua, whose *Defensor pacis* (called *Fridschirm Buch* in German), writ-

⁵³ D'Aygaliers, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

ten in coöperation with Jan of Jandum in 1324, had declared among many independent ideas that "the right of bans, or excommunication, should *not* be in the hands of a priest or a college of priests, but in the *gemeinde*, or congregation." An old chronicle (*Fritsche Closener Kronik*) declares that the appearance of this book "was an event." The authors were excommunicated in 1327; declared guilty of heresy in 1328; both went to the court of King Louis of Bavaria who is reported traditionally to have greeted them with "My God, who has persuaded you to come out of the land of peace and fame (France) to this warring kingdom?" and they answered that the love of the Church of Christ drove them out.⁵⁴ They with other Franciscan scholars like William of Occam (+ 1348) stayed at the king's court, a fact which did not make for reconciliation between king and pope. Among the scholars on the Pope's side was the Spanish Franciscan Alvarius Pelagius (+ 1352) who wrote a long detailed exposition *de planctu ecclesiae* giving twenty and more reasons why the Pope is supreme in temporal as well as spiritual matters, declaring that Louis, the Bavarian, was a *schismaticus* in that the Pope could confirm, anoint, crown, and dethrone kings."⁵⁵

The excesses and conflicts described in this chapter form an essential background to consideration of the lives and thought of the Friends of God who are the main theme of this study. But besides being conditioned by these troubled times, this century of chaos, these Friends of God drew their inspiration at a deeper level from the lasting and century-old heritage of the Church. Certain aspects of this heritage particularly relevant to them will be the theme of the next chapter.

Whenever the "German mystics of the fourteenth century" are mentioned, their names are usually cited in the following sequence: Eckhart, Tauler, Suso, Ruysbroeck, and the author of *Theologia deutsch*. Sometimes only Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso are mentioned. These were all Friends of God unless Meister Eckhart be distinguished as their immediate ancestor rather than as

⁵⁴ Keller, *op. cit.*, pp. 101, 113.

⁵⁵ In *Bibliothek Max. Pontif.*, III, 23 ff.

one of them. Heinrich von Nördlingen and his friend, Margaret Ebner, Christine Ebner, Adelheid Langman, were all active Friends of God toward the middle of the century. The religious manifestations like Beguines and Beghards, Free Spirits, and also the tertiaries of the regular orders were predominantly of the laity. The above-mentioned Friends of God, on the other hand, were all clerics, mostly regular. But it will be seen that there was also a very strong lay element in the groups of the Friends of God such as the Strassburg merchant Rulman Merswin and his wife Gertrude, Margaret of the Golden Ring, and others of Basel, "the great Friend of God of the Oberland," and knights and ladies and others mentioned in extant letters of Heinrich von Nördlingen to Margaret Ebner.

When in 1873 the Dominican scholar Heinrich Suso Denifle published *Das geistliche Leben: Blumenlese aus dem deutschen Mystikern*, the selections were mostly from Eckhart, Tauler, Suso, and other religious leaders in the fourteenth century. In the preface, Denifle admitted that he would be questioned concerning the value of making known in the nineteenth century thoughts of religious leaders who lived five hundred years earlier. "Not because the German mystics of the fourteenth century," he wrote, "expressed their times (*Zeitgeist*) but on the contrary, because they held a remedy, in that they combatted the avidity (*Begierlichkeit*) and distraction (*Zerstreuunglichkeit*) of their times," their "remedy" might be of use in the late nineteenth century when again restlessness was the "signature" of the day and when man had "become a stranger to himself in the multitude of things and separated himself from God."

In 1925 Rudolph Otto in lectures given in Union Theological Seminary (New York) compared eastern with western mysticism, particularly Sankara (c. 800) of India, with Meister Eckhart (1250-1327). Professor Otto made clear their likenesses in that the term "mystik" (true mysticism) can be applied to both, because of the common fundamental concept of an immanent God who though He can not be named and is beyond human knowledge, yet enters into a certain relationship with the individual soul, even though "mystic union" is rare. But as Professor Otto said, "*Mystik ist eben nicht einfach = mystik.*" There are sharp

differences; for instance, Sankara's God-idea is quite static; Eckhart's God-idea is quite dynamic. Professor Otto's distinction between *pantheismus* and that which is *theopantistisch* related the conception of a dynamic God-idea to the tremendous difference between a mystic who loses himself in other-worldliness or Nirvana, and one who could be called a practical mystic standing firmly in the world of human experience.⁵⁶

The possibility of a dynamic God-concept rooted in human experience, which could in some way integrate the individual and yet keep him a growing social being fascinated me. In our modern times man again seems "a stranger to himself in the multitude of things and separated from God"; and the remedy may lie in a *Weltanschauung* (world view) which will make man possess his own soul, be free from the dominance of men and things, and yet have humility and be subject to discipline in order to actualize his dreams.

Scholars in opening the trails or in clearing out "the thicket" of the social life of the fourteenth century, have valued differently these Friends of God. As de Hornstein in his study of these German mystics wrote in 1922,

the number of works which do not cease to appear on the multiple questions which constitute the *ensemble* of this problem give evidence that the hour is perhaps yet remote when one can establish a synthesis with security.⁵⁷

Delacroix refers to the Friends of God as *le cercle curieux de ces pieux laïques* and then studies Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso as individual mystics.⁵⁸ In contrast, Evelyn Underhill names them "a great informal society bound to the heroic attempt to bring life in the terribly corrupt and disordered life of the fourteenth century back into relation with spiritual reality and so initiate their neighbors into the atmosphere of God."⁵⁹ Lichtenberger in ex-

⁵⁶ Otto, Rudolf, *West-Östliche Mystik*, pp. 236-237. See also Part II, chap. v, "Weltgefühl, Weltbejahung gegen Weltverneinung."

⁵⁷ de Hornstein, Xavier, *Les Grands Mystiques allemands du XIV siècle Eckhart, Tauler, Suso*. Preface.

⁵⁸ Delacroix, *Essai sur le mysticisme spéculatif en Allemagne au XIV. siècle*.

⁵⁹ Underhill, E., *Mysticism*, p. 552.

plaining why German mysticism was studied in France says, "When we seek to understand what the mystics of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were and thought . . . we study under one of the most significant forms a psychological trait, very characteristic of the German people."⁶⁰ The present study aims to eschew the various prejudices that have animated much of the literature on the subject and to sift the evidence objectively for a factual narrative, and to present a picture of a certain kind of religious fulfillment.

In a century when there was but a step

from church to dance hall
from cowl to mummery,
from penitents' scourge
to fool's cap with bells⁶¹

and in an age when society can be characterized as *himmelhoch jauchzend, zu Tode betrübt* (rejoicing to high heaven, and saddened to death), the appearance of the *Gottesfreunde*, or God's friends, was a distinctly social-religious phenomenon. The question arises, Do chaotic times tend to create God-centered groups (remnants so to speak) around leaders of spiritual insight and of daring thoughts, especially if they emphasize the dignity of man and the possibility of his understanding the world in which he lives?

⁶⁰ Lichtenberger, "Le Mysticisme allemand," *Revue des cours*, pp. 445 ff.

⁶¹ Bücher, Carl, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

CHAPTER II

THE FRIENDS OF GOD AND
MEDIÆVAL IDEALS

THE TERM "FRIEND OF GOD" BEFORE THE
FOURTEENTH CENTURY

The Friends of God of the fourteenth century had definite ideas as to what constituted friendship with God. These ideas were not new, but in the face of floods, fire, earthquakes, famine, pestilence, and human conflicts, they gave more distinct significance to the term *Gottesfreund* by their zealous efforts to live their ideals in the midst of turmoil. Even though most of them were monks and nuns they found the problem of salvation very acute. In finding salvation for themselves and others, they sought exact words to describe their experiences.

Again, in this time of the weakening social control of the Roman Church, individuals and groups were forced to seek new consolation or ways to endure, or remedies for human ills. Man seemed to be thrown back upon his own intelligence, or upon guidance from God in whose intelligence he believed. Some Germans became self-scourgers to appease the wrath of God; some became "free spirits" to assert the individual's self-sufficiency. Some became hermits or cloistered folk to meditate and pray for themselves and others. Many, where it was possible, became more devout in the use of the Church's means of salvation, but some of these put too much faith in ascetic practices and religious rites. Some became zealous to know for themselves the truths taught them by the Church and above all, to test in their own living the idea of communion between God and the individual Christian. Thus certain ones who chose the idea of mutual friendship between God and man as a practical way to endure and to rise above the turmoil and grow toward perfection became

known as "God's friends" on earth. They were considered by many persons as "prophets."

The term "friend of God" was in the common medieval heritage. The idea of friendship goes back to the story reported by St. John that Jesus called his disciples not servants, but friends who kept his words. It was an idea of friendship which involved "one-ness" or union, well illustrated in St. Paul for whom "to live is Christ; and to die is gain." In the Old Testament, Moses and Abraham, Jeremiah and others knew God intimately as friend knew friend.

The Hebrew Song of Songs, or Song of Love, was exceedingly popular in medieval thought, especially after the many sermons of St. Bernard (1093-1153). The word *sodales* in Latin referring to the companions of the Bridegroom was usually translated in early French and German as "friends." In some paraphrases, Christ is addressed as "my friend."¹ There was from early Christian times a two-fold interpretation of the Bridegroom and Bride in the Song of Love: (1) The Bridegroom is Jesus Christ and the Bride is the Church; (2) The Bridegroom is the *Verbum Sponsus* (derived from the *Logos* idea) and the Bride is the devout individual soul. In this second interpretation (which dates back to Origen) the humanity and divinity of Christ are both implied, so that "friends of Christ" are spoken of in medieval literature without much distinction, if any, from friends of God. St. Bernard dwelt on the mysteries of the life of Jesus rather than on the events and his teaching. He urged the novices "to wait before the cradle of the infant Jesus and to lament before his cross." He believed and taught that God "in the first work, gave me myself; in the second Himself; and when He gave me Himself, He gave me back myself."² It was in Jesus' passion that Bernard found the greatest witness of the love of God: You have shown the greater love, O Lord, doing this for *enemies*. For while we were *yet enemies*, through your death we are reconciled with you.³

¹ Lürssen, Johanna, "Eine mittelniederdeutsche Paraphrase der Hohenliedes im," *Germanistische Abhandlungen*, Vol. XLIX.

² Bernard, "*De diligendo Deo*," chap. v, quoted from Edmund Gardner, *The Book of St. Bernard on the Love of God*.

³ Bernard, Sermo, "In feria IV Hebd." in Migne, *Patrologiae Lat.*, Vol. CLXXXIII.

When the ideal pope is described by St. Bernard to Pope Eugenius III (once his pupil), among many qualifications such as "the model of righteousness, the mirror of holiness, the pattern of piety, the asserter of truth, the defender of the faith, the teacher of peoples . . ." appeared "the friend of the bridegroom (*amicum sponsi*), the leader of the bride to the spouse."⁴

Bernard in his *De diligendo Deo* refers to friends of God as follows,

For in others whom He calls not beloved but friends . . . are those who are already loosed from the bond of the flesh: they are so much dearer as they become more prompt and unimpeded for loving.

It is interesting that Bernard calls "the beloved" those who are perfected; "the friends" are those on the way to perfection.⁵

In the little book *On Union with God*, usually ascribed to Albertus Magnus (c. 1200-1280), famous Dominican scholar, much was said about the qualifications of "the true friend of Jesus Christ." Such a one "must be so united by his intelligence and will to the divine will and goodness that his imagination and passions have no hold over him, and that he troubles not whether men give him love or ridicule, nor heeds what may be done to him."⁶

One of the most interesting passages in a sermon of St. Bernard is the description of the Bridegroom entering his own heart—an experience which recurred several times. The "entering" was accompanied "by the sudden departure of vices."⁷ Certain conditions are present in the soul into which the Bridegroom entered,

Nevertheless He will not present Himself even in passing to every soul; but to that soul only which is shown by great devotion, vehement desire, and tender affection to be his Bride.⁸

⁴ Bernard, "De consideratione," Bk. IV, chap. vii. Migne, *op. cit.*, Vol. CLXXXII.

⁵ Bernard, "De diligendo Deo," chap. xi, in Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 103. Cf. with Ruysbroeck below, chap. viii.

⁶ *On Union with God*, "Angelus Series," p. 41. See on question of authorship Grabman, Martin, *Mittelalterliches Geistesleben*, p. 477. Johann von Kastel is named as author.

⁷ Bernard, *Canticum Canticorum*, LXXIV, see Butler: *Western Mysticism*, p. 147.

⁸ *Ibid.*, XXXII, quoted Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

The soul which has a burning thirst for God does not ask liberty, nor reward, nor heritage, nor knowledge but a kiss.⁹

In his love for Jesus, Bernard distinguishes clearly between "the love of the heart which is in a certain sense carnal, moving the heart of man towards the flesh of Christ" and "the love which does not so much regard the Word as flesh as the word which is Wisdom—Justice—Truth—Holiness—Goodness—Virtue, and all other perfections of whatever kind."¹⁰

As evidence that St. Bernard himself was considered God's friend, and also that the idea of friendship was associated with certain speculations as to the unity of God, I quote here from an unknown preacher of the early fourteenth century,—

St. Bernard came into a great school of honored wise masters. They questioned him. "How does one divide God?" And he answered, "*Deus non est pars; deus est totum . . . every priest has God whole and undivided and as many persons receive him, each receives him whole and undivided. He becomes to each as whole and as complete as he arose on Easter Day. God is all in all things; and as much as God is in all things, so much are they good.*" And Sanctus Bernhartz said no more about this. Whereupon the masters said to one another, "Where did this low fellow learn that God is undivided? He has never been in a great school." Then the fourteenth century preacher continues, "Yes, *this friend of God had perceived in his inwardness many sweet rejoicings that he had with God.*"¹¹

In a middle high German *Marien-leben* by Brother Philipps (thirteenth century) the young virgin herself says to God,

Du bist min lieber pruitigam
Dir gib ich meinen magetuom
Du bist min vil schoener man

⁹ *Ibid.*, VII, 2, quoted Pourrat, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, XX, see Eales, S. J., Bernard's Sermons on the Canticle, pp. 113-114. In medieval tradition, body and spirit while distinct were not sharply distinguished in words, for example, physical meant natural and not bodily. See also the study of Rousselot: *Pour l'histoire du problème de l'amour au Moyen Âge*, in "Beiträge zur Geschichte des Mittelalters," Vol. VI.

¹¹ Wackernagel, *Alteutsche Predigten*, p. 597.

Du bist min vriedel und min vriunt
Ich bin von diner minne entzündet.

(You are my dear bridegroom; to you I give my maidenhood! you are my handsome spouse; you are my lover and my friend; with your love I am inflamed.)¹²

In the literature of *Gottesfreunde*, God's friends are frequently contrasted with "children of the world" (*welt-kinder*). Before the fourteenth century, the two contrasted were more often "God's friends" and "God's enemies." In the *Song of Roland* there is a people described as "always the enemy of God."¹³ *Holy Rules for a Perfected Life* written by a Cistercian monk of the thirteenth century described "the deadly enemies of our Lord."¹⁴ Berthold von Regensburg, Franciscan, probably the most popular wandering preacher of the thirteenth century, was preaching about "the twelve sinners" when he suddenly interrupted himself to say "if God gives me grace, I'll tell you of God's friends . . . of whom there must be some here." One wonders if his listeners were resisting the too definite portrayal of themselves as sinners. Berthold continued by addressing the enemies of God present with the expressed desire—"God help me that you repent so that you do not remain long in the curse of eternal death." He emphasized his point by explaining the Lord's hostility to sinners. A hospital or a monastery founded by a person guilty of deadly sin is not as acceptable to God as one "Our Father" from a just person.¹⁵

Mechthild (Matilda) von Magdeburg (1210-1301) in her famous book *Das fliessende Licht der Gottheit* expresses various ideas about God's friends, a name which she applies mostly to faithful

¹² Quoted by H. O. Taylor in *The Medieval Mind*, I, 460.

¹³ *Song of Roland*, lines 3260-3261: *c'est une race qui a toujours été ennemie de Dieu* refers to soldiers of "Val-fronde" (probably an imaginary place). In line 6, a King Marsileus is called "enemy of God" serving Mahomet and invoking Apollo.

¹⁴ Priebisch, Robert, *Die heilige Regel für ein vollkommenes Leben*, pp. 67 ff: also, p. 3, there is a story of a young priest vowed to chastity but loving to dance and to make merry who had a vision in which "God's Mother" addressed him as "dear true friend."

¹⁵ Berthold von Regensburg, *Predigten*, edited by Franz Pfeiffer, Vol. II.

believing persons. She does express, as some of the Friends of God do later, the idea of God withdrawing and being strange (*fremd*) even to the loving soul. And she says that this strangeness on the part of God causes the soul "death agony beyond all pain."¹⁶

The term "friend of God" was sometimes used in the naming of heretics. Wilhelm of St. Amour of the University of Paris in 1272 used it in connection with Beguines in France. His interest was to hinder pseudo-preachers "dangerous in their opinions, overturning precepts of sane religion." They read books "which they called mystic." He states that frequently these Beguines are in *colloquia* with Dominican and Franciscan *familiae* (households). "And perhaps they [*familiae*] invite them! for they, the religious, assert that friends of God ought in no way to be shut out from the consolation of holy persons."¹⁷ Earlier in the same century David von Augsburg in a tract concerning Waldensians speaks of "those hypocrites who take to themselves various names which are certainly heretical but they call themselves 'true Christians' and 'friends of God' and 'God's poor' and names of that kind."¹⁸ The tract continues explicitly, "these claim to be successors of the apostles and are teachers and confessors of others and go about making converts and confirming their pupils in error." Their dress, their places of sojourn, places of meeting, and their adoration of Lucifer are minutely described.

Most often, however, the term "God's friends" is used in praise of prophets, evangelists, martyrs, good and pious folk. In an eleventh century poem "Heaven and Hell," "all God's friends, who have been perfected have a place with the four evangelists on the heavenly mountain of God which has need neither of sun or light or moon, for God illumines all." After many lines describing the joyous singing, the peace, love, the glory of it all (one is reminded of Dante's later vision of paradise) the praise

¹⁶ Mechtild von Magdeburg, *Das fliessende Licht der Gottheit*, edited by Wilhelm Oehl.

¹⁷ "Dei enim amicos divelli nullo modo debere adseverabant et sanctorum virorum."—Mosheim, *De Beghardis et Bequinabus*, p. 42.

¹⁸ Preger, W., in *Abhandlungen der historischen Classe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*. XIV (1879), 203 ff.

of heaven closes with "this is the highest good which has been prepared for God's true friends for them to enjoy forever and ever."¹⁹

Elizabeth von Schönau (+ 1165), the prophetess who not only had visions but did research work as to the identity of the 11,000 martyred virgins of Cologne wrote to a certain learned monk, "Now moreover, O friend of God (*o amice dei*), remember with all solicitude of mind in what manner this world passes and the flower of it withers and vanishes."²⁰

An old fragment concerning the mystical life associates *alle gotzvrunde* with the articles of Christian faith. The term is quite definitely related to Jesus' words about being his friends if his will is done. And then

Verily among all his friends are his secret faithful ones S. Peter and S. Paul, who are not aware that they through his grace were chosen to be the two princes of all Christendom. They drank the cup of our Lord, suffered through God many martyrdoms. And through this they became God's friends. . . . Now see my very dear children, now mark quite well, how honored are God's friends and their kingdom is established. . . . Peter was chosen to be a preacher . . . God showed him on Mt. Tabor his Godhead. Paul was led into the third heaven.²¹

Suffering is a distinctive mark of God's friendship, and humility even unto martyrdom also. Mechthild von Magdeburg wrote a whole chapter concerning a vision as to "How God touches his friends with suffering."²² Honors bestowed on God's friends are

¹⁹ Himmel und Hölle, lines 109-113. *Zeitschrift für deutsches Alterthum*, Vol. III.

"Daz ist daz hereste guot
daz der vore gegarawet ist
Gotes trut friunden
mit imo ze niezenne
ie mer in e wa"

In the 73 lines in which hell is described all human suffering is pictured, beginning with "death without death" or everlasting death.

²⁰ Roth, F. W. E., *Die Visionen und Briefe der hl. Eliz.*, pp. 139, 149. See also Roth, *Das Gebetbuch des hl. Elizabeth von Schönau*.

²¹ Kelle, J., "Speculum ecclesiae" in *Alideutsche Predigten*.

²² "Wie got ruret sine frunde mit der pine."—Gall Morel, *Offenbarungen der Schwester Mechthild*, chap. lvi.

frequently given only in heaven. However, in the *Roman Missal*, in the services used on the days of holy prophets and martyrs their honor is expressed in the responses chanted by priests and monks with many "Alleluias" interspersed. "Marvelous to me are the honors shown thy friends. Their renown sounds throughout the earth."²³

There is a famous twelfth century letter extant which was sent "To the brothers of the mountain of God" in which the three stages of the religious life (*incipientium, proficientium et perfectorum*) are explained, with a statement that what "God is by nature, man becomes through grace." Peter's denial and Mary Magdalene's sin are mentioned, and then their honor. "In this holy society (*societate*) there will be also unfailing and perfect friendship." There is also included the response, "because marvelously are the friends of God honored."²⁴

There is a joyous old hymn sung by choirs of monks or of nuns throughout the troubled times. The refrain following each stanza is irresistible.

Ima iu-iu-iubilieren
 meditieren
 Iu-iu-iu-iubilieren
 contemplieren
 Iu-iu-iu-iubilieren
 Iu-iu-iu-iubilieren
 speculieren
 Iu-iu-iu-iubilieren
 concordieren.

One can imagine the accumulative effect. It would be something like "re-re-re-rejoice" or "sing-sing-sing, sing! Meditating. Sing-sing-sing-sing! Contemplating—Speculating—Harmonizing or Concoriding." This hymn of joy began with "Rejoice daughter

²³ Old Roman Missal, Nuremberg, 1484. Beautiful copy used by Franciscans of Bamberg in Columbia University Library.

²⁴ *Epistola seu tractatus ad fratres de monte Dei.* in Migne, Patr. Lat., CLXXXIV. In speaking of the conversations between God and Moses, *Sicut vir ad amicum suum. In qua credo fidelis anima Verbo Dei coniungitur, sponsa sponso sociatur, terrenis colestra, humanis divina uniuntur.* . . . col. 314.

of Zion. . . . *You have become God's friend.*" It is the individual "you" to whom the glorious message belongs.

The place of the Hebrew *Song of Songs* in medieval tradition has been indicated. The *Book of Wisdom* was equally important and was included in special services of the common ritual. The seventh chapter of the Hebrew *Book of Wisdom* contains many of the ideas common among the Friends of God of the Rhine valley. Suso, one of the leaders, was the avowed servitor of Eternal Wisdom. The very term "friends of God" appears in the following:

For she (Wisdom) is a treasure unto men that never faileth; which they that use become the friends of God being commanded for the gifts that come from learning. (*Book of Wisdom*, VII, 14.)

And being but one, she can do all things; and remaining in her self, she maketh all things new; and in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God and prophets. (*Book of Wisdom*, VII, 27.)

Thus we see that before the fourteenth century, the term "friend of God" had long been used to indicate an ideal state of exceptional closeness to the Divine, and a stage of growth toward spiritual perfection.²⁵ There was also the implication of a contrast to an alien, this-worldly state of enmity to God. The Friends of God of the fourteenth century have this sense of opposition and strangeness preserved for them by virtue of living in the troubled times; at the same time they draw strength, not only from their individual experiences of turning from the world to God, but from a long heritage of questing after God. The closeness to God which they take as their particular ideal is after all but a variant in the common desire to approach the Divine—a longing which belonged to many persons in preceding centuries. Certain major aspects of the medieval effort to approach God, which were of particular influence upon "God's friends" of the fourteenth century, will be briefly reviewed in the second part of this chapter. The aspects illustrated will include:

²⁵ For study of use of term in Greek philosophy see "Der Gottesfreund" Beiträge zur Geschichte eines religiösen Terminus," by Erik Peterson in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, Vol. XLII (1923).

1. The love of God as expounded by St. Bernard.
2. The Roman Mass.
3. The Franciscan contributions to the love of God.
4. The Dominican aspiration toward the wisdom of God.
5. The mystic approach.

MAJOR STRAINS IN THE SPIRITUAL INHERITANCE OF THE
FRIENDS OF GOD OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

The Love of God as Expounded by St. Bernard

In St. Bernard's treatise *de charitate* he speaks of the soul (*anima*) as having "two eyes"; with one it understands (*intelligit*); with the other, it seeks (*inquirat*) and of these two the right eye is love which wounds in its constant seeking (*qui requirendo vulnerat*). There are likewise for him two kinds of ecstasy in holy contemplation: the one in the intellect, the other in the heart (*affectus*); the one in light, the other in fervor; the one in discernment, the other in devotion.²⁶ Of equal importance to this study of the ideas of God's friends is Bernard's idea that this light illuminating the intellect is given "not through open doors but through narrow apertures . . . so long as this sorry wall of the body subsists."²⁷ And even this "pure and brilliant ray of truth" is made bearable to man's mind by the "imaginary likenesses of lower things," a kind of shading of "the something from God" which comes momentarily and as it were with the swiftness of a flash of light." Like his contemporaries, Bernard believed in angels, good and bad. He suggests that "the shading" is done by "the holy angels."²⁸

Bernard's love for God found three major channels of expression—at least, three which shaped the general expressions of Christian piety in the next centuries. They were: (1) his exposition of the *Song of Songs* (*Cantica canticorum*) in the eighty-six sermons, the last of which were preached shortly before his death;

²⁶ Migne, Patr. Lat., Vol. CLXXXIV—Bernard, *De charitate*. Bernard, *Canticum Canticorum*, XLIX, 4.

²⁷ Bernard, *ibid.*, XVII, 8.

²⁸ Bernard, *ibid.*, XLI, 3. Butler, *op. cit.*, 152-153.

(2) his adoration of the Virgin; (3) his concentration on the birth and passion of Jesus Christ.

Dante in Paradise is directed to Mary by one who assures him that

The Queen of Heaven then for whom I burn
Wholly with love, will grant us every grace,
For I am Bernard, faithful unto her.²⁹

Bernard is "the singer of Mary" popularizing the name of "Our Lady."³⁰ Bernard sings her praises through many lines.

Quid dicemus de te, o prae clara mater inter mulieres? si solem te dixerimus splendidior es; si rosam floridior es. . . .³¹

He portrays Mary during the crucifixion—"there stood Mary" (*stabat Maria*) begins many a sentence in his book *On the passion of Christ and the sorrows of his Mother*. She begs to die in her son's place. She suffers intensely as she receives her son's body from the cross.³² It was doubtless preaching like this that promoted the common use of the prayer "Hail Mary, Mother of God" and gave inspiration for the sculptured figure of the *Piéta* popular to this very day in the Roman Catholic Church as the symbol of one who never fails to understand the suffering human soul.

Concerning Bernard's love for Jesus, the following quotation indicates his devotion as readily as many which could be chosen:

To meditate on this [the life and sufferings] of Jesus Christ, I have called wisdom; in these I have placed the perfection of

²⁹ *Paradiso*, XXXI, lines 100-102. See also the song in Heaven to the Blessed Virgin, *ibid.*, XXXIII.

³⁰ Pourrat, *op. cit.*, pp. 77 ff. In the twelfth century four festival days in the Church were dedicated to the Virgin, honoring her birth, purification, the Annunciation and the Assumption. Others were added in the next centuries. Bernard argued against the Church's adopting as doctrine the Immaculate Conception on the ground that Mary could not be sanctified before she existed, and that she did not exist before she was conceived. Migne, *Patr. Lat.*, Vol. CLXXXII.

³¹ Migne, *Patr. Lat.*, Vol. CLXXXII, col. 1147.

³² Bernard, "Liber de passione Christu et doloribus et planctibus matris eius."—Migne, *Patr. Lat.*, Vol. CLXXXII.

righteousness for me, the fullness of knowledge, the abundance of merits, the riches of salvation; there is among them for me sometimes a draught of *salutary bitterness*, sometimes a sweet unction of consolation.³³

In the fifteenth chapter of *De diligendo Deo*, Bernard distinguished four degrees of love. There is the love (1) when man loves God for his own sake, (2) when man loves God to his own profit, (3) when man loves God for God's sake, and (4) the best of all, when man loves himself only for the sake of God. Of this fourth state, Bernard exclaimed, "Let those who have experienced this, tell us: to me I confess it seems impossible. *Sic affici deificari* (to be thus affected is to become God)! There will remain a certain substance but in another form, another glory, another potentiality (*potentia*). Otherwise, how will God be all in all if in man somewhat remains over of man?"³⁴

St. Bernard teaches,

There are then three states in the progress of souls, sufficiently well known at least to those who have experienced them, when as far as is possible in these weak bodies of ours they are enabled to take knowledge either of the pardon which they have received for their evil actions, or the grace which has enabled them to do good ones; or lastly of the very presence of Him who is their patron and benefactor.³⁵

Earlier in the same sermon he had spoken of "the first fruits of conversion," of progress, and of that which is rarely experienced, perfection; and he symbolized them with "the kiss of the Feet of Jesus; the kiss of the Hand; and the kiss of the Mouth." In all that Bernard teaches about love, one might expect "too much sweetness and tenderness." There is rather in the

³³ *Canticum Canticorum*, XLIII, 4. Quoted from Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

³⁴ Quoted from Gardner, *op. cit.*, chap. xv. The doctrine of deification or "the conception of salvation as the acquisition by man of Divine attributes is common to many forms of religious thought." The process may be conceived of (*a*) as essentialism, (*b*) as substitution. The former lays stress on the high calling of man and his potential greatness as the image of God; the latter, on his present misery and alienation, and his need of redemption. See Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, Appendix C.

³⁵ *Canticum Canticorum*, IV, quoted from Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

"Doctor of Love," what Pourrat calls "the ruggedness [or rudeness] of the hermit."

The idea of a perfected state, achieved through the grace of God and man's response and willingness, even with "salutary bitterness" to yield his whole self as a love sacrifice to the will of God, persists in the Christian tradition. Imitation of the life of Jesus Christ, the Saviour, has always implied entering into his Passion—the greatest love sacrifice known to Christians in that Jesus is believed to be God-in-man, the Son of God.

The Mass of the Roman Catholic Church

The ceremonies and liturgy which developed in the Church found their highest expression in the Mass.³⁶ As the Mass developed it combined two ideas not easy to separate and yet they are distinct: (1) the Mass is a *sacrament* for the consolation and strengthening of the individual soul; (2) the Mass is a *sacrifice*, the renewing of God's own gift and sacrifice in "the second creation" Jesus Christ. The life and passion of Jesus are relived by all true participants who in devotion at the same time offer their all, a giving back of themselves to God.

The first part of the Mass (from the introit to the offertory) symbolizes the preparation of the world for the Incarnation; the patriarchs and prophets are praised, for they awaited His coming; there follows the ministry and passion of Christ (from the offertory to the *Agnus Dei*); then the Resurrection of the glorified Christ is celebrated (from the *Agnus Dei* to the time of

³⁶ The first use of the word *missa* was by St. Ambrose (+ 397). The Mass was also called "Liturgy of the Faithful." The Eastern Church does not use the word "mass" but "liturgy."

In the "Dialog" of St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), the Mass is described as "that tavern standing on the Bridge (the Son of God) to provide food and comfort for the travellers and the pilgrims . . . lest they should faint through weakness. This food strengthens little or much according to the desire of the recipient, whether he receives sacramentally or virtually. He receives sacramentally when he actually communicates with the Blessed Sacrament. He receives virtually when he communicates both by desire of Communion and by contemplation of the Blood of Christ crucified. . . . Trans. from Thorold, G., *The Dialogue of the Seraphic Virgin*, p. 137.

actual Communion) ; then the Communion, the most solemn moment of union between God and the soul; and after this, the coming of the Holy Spirit is celebrated.³⁷

The Mass became the greatest consolation and source of strength for living to the people of the Middle Ages. The unlettered common folk understood the liturgy because they had been carefully instructed in it and tested before they were admitted as "elect" to the participation in the Mass. Its efficacy in general belief (and among scholars as well) was such that unworthy priests administering it could in no way lessen its living power. Withholding of the sacrament of the Mass was a severe discipline. It must be remembered that in those days "all the world" attended services especially on festival days. Stories were prevalent of what happened to individuals who did not attend services, or to parents who did not set their children a good example in the matter. The great cathedrals embodied in their very portals and pillars and in their windows, paintings and sculpturing, the aspirations and often the gifts of the whole people. The drama of the Mass, so to speak, was heightened by the processions of clergy, by antiphonal chanting with frequent responses from the people; there were bells and gorgeous colors, incense and prayers—the whole, a service of profound spiritual meaning to most, if not all of, the participants. The number of Masses to be sung in a day had to be regulated for both clergy and people. The Mass was and is a great religious celebration, both social (a brotherhood of the children of God) and individual in that each soul shares and profits according to the sincerity of his life and subsequent conduct.

The Franciscan Contributions to the Love of God

If St. Bernard may be called "the Doctor of Love," St. Francis of the next century is without question "the Great Lover" of the Middle Ages and "the Troubadour of God." His kinship with all creatures is well known, "the worshipful brother sun—sister moon and the stars—brother wind—sister water—brother fire—sister

³⁷ See *Catholic Encyclopedia* (Appleton), Vol. X; see also Duchesne, L., *The Roman Mass in Christian Worship*; Migne, Patr. Lat., Vol. CXLII, c. 1060; Migne, Patr. Lat., *op. cit.*, Vol. LXXVIII; also Vol. CLI.

mother-earth—our sister, the bodily death.” His “sermon to the birds,” though traditional, is a symbol of his oneness with nature which was not “the egoistic pleasure of a dilettante. He *cared* that the plant had its share of the sun, that the bird had its nest and that the very humblest of the manifestations of the creative force should possess in unconscious happiness everything to which it might aspire.”³⁸ As Dunstan Dobbins states in *Franciscan Mysticism*, “Not all mystics have been able to join with St. Francis in his delight and comfort derived from the thought that the whole of nature, hitherto overcrowded by darkness of the sun, had in some mysterious way participated in the great atoning work of Christ.”³⁹

It is not, however, St. Francis’ devotion to nature as the manifestation of God which most influenced his followers, but his devotion to Lady Poverty. Francis is often referred to in church writings as the *poverello d’Assise*. In Sabatier’s *Life of St. Francis*, he quotes the saint as teaching,

When the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I ought to do; but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I ought to live according to the model of the holy gospel; I caused a simple formula to be written and the lord pope confirmed it for me.

This formula is: “Our rule is the Gospel; our life and above all poverty is the imitation of Christ.”

St. Francis describes the early group of brothers as follows:

Those who presented themselves to observe this kind of life distributed all that they had to the poor. They contented themselves with a tunic patched within and without, with the cord and breeches. We desired to have nothing more.⁴⁰

As one reads the Rules to which Franciscans vowed life obedience, one perceives that “great humility” was a requirement of the order. In one writing, all the brothers are urged “to preach by their works,” and

³⁸ From Mme. Avede Barine. Quoted by E. Récéjac (*op. cit.*, pp. 68-69).

³⁹ Dobbins, Dunstan, *Franciscan Mysticism*, Oxford diss. See also Romans 8:22.

⁴⁰ *François d’Assise, son oeuvre, son influence 1226-1926*, pp. 337-339.

Let all the brothers strive to follow the humility and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ and let them remember that we ought to have nothing else in the world except as the Apostle says, "Having food and wherewith to be covered with these we are content."⁴¹

St. Francis' last wish written to his associate and friend, St. Clare was:

I little brother Francis wish to follow the life and poverty of Jesus Christ our Most High Lord and of His Most Holy Mother and to persevere therein until the end. And I beseech you all, my ladies, and counsel you, to live always in this most holy life and poverty. And watch yourselves well that you in no wise depart from it through the teaching or advice of any one.⁴¹

The sternness of the gentle St. Francis is seldom noted. As difficulties developed among the brothers he not only urges them but he "admonishes and exhorts" them. In his last *Will*, he "strictly enjoins by obedience" or as translated in another version, "I absolutely interdict"—and this had to do with asking for "any Bull from the court of Rome . . . under any pretext whatsoever" not even for their personal protection. He urged them, moreover, to "show themselves to be joyful and contented in the Lord, merry and becomingly courteous."

Francis was not a schoolman yet he probably never meant his followers to despise learning. Scholars dispute as to whether or not St. Francis opposed study. He was opposed to organization which might bind or absorb the interest of his followers. The main end of his order was for men to be servants of the Lord and of all people.

The membership both regular and tertiary increased rapidly. This created a problem in administration. The vows were binding on lay members. The Franciscans quarreled and separated on the differing interpretations of "poverty." No sooner had St. Francis died than questions arose: How shall poverty be understood? Shall a tomb be built for Francis? Shall a school be built in Paris? What kind of chapels (if any) shall be built? and other such questions. Pope Gregory IX was appealed to for an interpretation of St. Francis' *Rules and Will*. The closest comrades of St. Francis

⁴¹ Father Paschal Robinson, *The Writings of St. Francis of Assisi*.

insisted that absolute poverty was meant and nothing else. It was a difficult matter to decide when the Papacy was collecting money and the other mendicant order was establishing chairs in the universities. The Pope answered that the brothers were not bound by the Will but that both Rule and Will were "revealed by the Most High to Francis, according to the Gospels." This did not help much but at the time the Pope declared that gifts of money could be kept in trust for a group by "a spiritual friend of the Order."⁴²

The great Franciscan Bonaventura (1221-1274; canonized 1482) systematized the Franciscan doctrine keeping the love theme of its teachings. He was known as "the seraphic doctor." His writings on "the Journey of the Mind to God" (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*) probably earned for him renown as "a spiritual geographer" in the sense that he points the way and gives the means whereby one can attain to "an enlightenment of the understanding and an inflaming of the will in preparation for the fullest Christian life known to mystics. Bonaventura defined three ways—*via purgativa*, *via illuminata*, *via perfecta or unitiva*—a threefold process which had been defined centuries before by pseudo-Dionysius as belonging to angelic activity, and which practically appears in Augustine (though the names are not used) and in St. Bernard's "Kisses of the Feet; Kisses of the Hand, Kisses of the Mouth" of Jesus.⁴³ Bonaventura was interested in increas-

⁴² The word "spirituals" was taken by those who separated from the Order to keep the Rules as they understood them. When "spirituals" did not separate, they formed a "reform party" within the Order. Sometimes they were in control of the General Order, as for the last time under John of Parma (1247-1257). See also Ehrle, F., "Petrus Johannis Olivi, great leader of the 'Spirituals' in Strassburg" (1282-1287) in *Archiv für Literatur und Kirchengeschichte*, III, pp. 517 ff.

The papal Bull "Bull elongati a saeculo" can be found in Sabatier's edition of *Speculum perfectum*, pp. 314 ff.

⁴³ On Bonaventura see Dobbins, *Franciscan Mysticism*; also article in Ueberweg. In connection with the threefold way, Hugo of St. Victor, contemporary of Bernard, should be quoted. In writing of the spiritual development of souls he states "First they are purified; after this, they are illumined; then they are perfected" and repeats that *purgatis* must precede *illuminatis* which must precede *consummatis*. See Migne, *Patr. Lat.*, *op. cit.*, Vol. CLXXV, col. 998.

ing love for divine things. He emphasized the value of imitating Christ's suffering. To him, man had three eyes—the soul had six powers—the highest of which was the *apex mentis* (synteresis). Ecstasy accompanied the highest stage; and union with God is through love.

The Dominican Aspiration toward the Wisdom of God

Although the Friends of God derived much from St. Bernard and the Franciscans, most of them were Dominicans or directly under the influence of Dominican teaching. St. Dominic (1170-1221) was a Spaniard distinguished early in life for his seriousness of purpose, austerity of manner, and for his learning. One is tempted to explain how his order came into being and received papal sanction in the same decade as that of St. Francis. According to the constitution of "the Order of Preachers," the order was instituted primarily for preaching and for the salvation of souls.

The order received papal confirmation under the ancient rule of St. Augustine in December, 1216. Before one year passed, a chair in theology was established in the University of Paris, another, in the University of Bologna, and one in Dominic's *Alma Mater*, the University of Palencia.⁴⁴ *Studia generalia* were set up in places like Cologne and Strassburg with a master of theology and two bachelors in charge. At the time of the formation of the order, there were sixteen monks. Dominic appointed his associates to various parts of western Europe. When Dominic died in 1221 there were eight Dominican provinces, one of which was "Teutonia." To this very day, Dominicans are Masters of the Sacred Palace in Rome, that is, they are the papal theologians.

Intellectual interests continued to dominate the Dominicans. There was some quarreling as to the amount of money, time, and energy which should be given for schools. By 1315, the general chapter meeting commanded the Masters to lecture to all religious on the moral sciences (Aristotle). Foreign language study was required. The disagreements over the interpretation of poverty and other controversial questions were cared for, however, by a

⁴⁴ The Franciscan Order also established chairs at Paris, Oxford, and elsewhere.

rule adopted at a general meeting, that the final word in such matters could rest with the local supervisors of a monastery.

The great Dominican masters in the latter part of the thirteenth century were Albertus Magnus (c. 1200-1280) of the Cologne Dominican school, and his more distinguished pupil, Thomas Aquinas, (1225-1274); their teachings immediately preceded the appearance of Meister Eckhart and his followers, the Friends of God. Thomas Aquinas' genius as a great thinker was recognized in his day by the Church.

Of all human pursuits the *pursuit of wisdom* is the more perfect, the more sublime, the more useful, and the more agreeable. The more perfect because in so far as a man gives himself up to the pursuit of wisdom, to that extent he enjoys already some portion of true happiness [here St. Thomas quoted Eccles. XIV: 22] . . . the more sublime, because thereby man comes closest to the likeness of God who hath made all things in wisdom (Ps. CIII: 4) . . . the more useful because by this same wisdom we arrive at the realm of immortality (Wis. VI: 21) . . . the more agreeable because her conversation hath no bitterness, nor her company any weariness but gladness and joy.⁴⁵

The too easy generalization—"the dark medieval ages"—is being modified not only in the light of the consideration of a system of thought like that of Aquinas, but with information available from scholarly research concerning the beginnings of modern science in the same period. Five European universities date back to the twelfth century. In *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, Haskins includes with "the epoch of the Crusades," and "the rise of towns," "the culmination of Romanesque art and the beginnings of Gothic; emergence of the vernacular literatures; the revival of the Latin classics and of Latin poetry and Roman law; the recovery of Greek science with its Arabic additions, and of much of Greek philosophy."⁴⁶ True, the above happened mostly in countries other than "Teutonia," yet Thomas Aquinas, Italian, educated in Cologne and Paris, was international in his influence. The

⁴⁵ Aquinas, "Of God and Creatures," translated by J. Rickaby.

⁴⁶ Haskins, C. H., *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, Pref. p. viii. See also Thorndike, Lynn, *Science and Thought in the Fifteenth Century*. Taylor, H. O., *The Medieval Mind*.

Dominican and Franciscan wandering preachers knew very little of separation because of the particular people or place of their birth.

What I have just implied in the preceding paragraphs is specifically that the Friends of God, many of whom were Dominicans, had in their immediate background a sturdy intellectual strain. Perhaps the best-known fact about Aquinas is that through his careful writings on God's knowledge, and the relation of man to God, he developed for the Church the *scientia Dei*. What is of like importance, however, for our subject, is that the Dominican teaching, for all its emphasis on intellect and "the primacy of knowing," did not fail to recognize a certain "primacy of loving."

Though to St. Thomas "the beatitude of my created intellectual nature consists in knowing (*intelligendo*)," and "taken absolutely, the understanding is higher than the will," yet "when the thing in which the good is nobler than the soul itself, in which the *ratio* is known, the will through relation to that thing is higher than the understanding . . . wherefore the love of God is better than the cognizance of Him. . . . In the things of God natural reason is often at a loss." (*Pars prima*, Qu. XXVI, Art. 2; also Qu. LXXXII, Art. 3.)

For Thomas, there are degrees of charity. Thomas distinguishes them as belonging to the "incipient" one, or beginning Christian; the "proficient" one, or advancing Christian, and to the one who above all strives "to be united to God and enjoy Him and this pertains to the perfect." This love of God signified to Thomas "a certain friendship with Him which begins in the present by grace, and is perfected in the future by glory."⁴⁷

The little book *On Union with God*, already referred to as undoubtedly well known to the Friends of God, taught concerning "the image of God imprinted upon the soul and manifested in the three powers of the reason, memory, and will,—the reason to be illuminated; the will, devoted; and the memory, absorbed in contemplation." And it was "by these three powers that man

⁴⁷ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, 11, qu. 65.

ought without intermediary purely and directly to be united to Him and cleave to Him."⁴⁸

The Mystic Approach to God

The Friends of God of the fourteenth century are known as "German mystics." They show with varying emphasis both the approach to God through knowledge, characteristic of Dominican theologians, and the approach through love as seen in St. Bernard and St. Francis. The approach suggested in such a phrase as quoted from *On Union with God* "without intermediary purely and directly to be united with God and to cleave to Him" implies a way of approach not unlike the others, but distinctly more self-reliant and intimate. The way culminating in "pure and direct union" between God and man is generally called "the mystic way."

From Plotinus down through the Middle Ages (and to this modern era) runs a strain of thought and experience commonly designated as mystic. There is a connection between the term and the Greek mystery religions. The early Christian scholars, however, seldom used this word; they named the experiences *contemplatio*. A small treatise bearing the title, *Mystical Theology* (author, pseudo-Dionysius) dates back to the fifth century. This book came to the knowledge of medieval thinkers through the translation and commentary by Scotus Erigena in the ninth century. The word mysticism (*mystik* or *mystique*) was not in current use until the later Middle Ages. This is readily understood when one perceives by study (or experience) that the mystic approach does not differ essentially (in essence), i.e., in idea from the thought underlying other approaches; nor does it differ in the quality of love in the various approaches to God; the difference has always been in *degree of emphasis on the idea of the union of God and man, and in the manner and energy with which this idea is realized either in the intellect or in the will of man.*⁴⁹

In a study of medieval Christian mysticism, Hugo (+ 1143)

⁴⁸ *On Union with God* ("De adhaerendo Deo."), op. cit., chap. iii.

⁴⁹ See Harnack, *History of Dogma* (trans. Buchanan, 1897), VI, 97.

and Richard (+ 1173), Augustinian canons of St. Victor at Paris are of like importance with the pseudo-Dionysius and Scotus Erigena. Hugo of St. Victor is sometimes called the real founder of medieval mysticism, in that he explained specifically the ascent of the soul to God in three stages, *cogitatio*, *meditatio*, and *contemplatio*. Richard wrote a tract on the *Four Degrees of Burning Love* which described the mystical experience in terms of betrothal, of wedding, of whole surrender, and of transforming union. The writings of both were evidently known to the mystics of the fourteenth century.

In the judgment of mystics the Heart is an implicit of Reason and Love in which those two powers are really subordinate. Desire, which is only the active essence of Reason, surpasses in swiftness and energy all process of Dialectics and is able to give us intuitions which astonish pure Reason.⁵⁰

Thus Récéjac in his study of the basis of mystic knowledge states concisely certain distinctions of the mystic experience. In its main interests it is certainly not outside the province of medieval thought as a whole (the great mystics recognize this and say so). Yet it is distinguished by certain traits and claims which have caused mystics to be sometimes the objects of suspicion on the part of the orthodox. "It cannot be denied," writes Cuthbert Butler, "that the mystics find themselves in bad company."⁵¹ Of this "bad company" something will be said later.

← The distinguishing traits of this mystic strain appear to be as follows: 1) A profound belief in the ultimate unity of God and the individual self; 2) An ascetic attitude toward life both outer and inner, which shows itself in a withdrawal from the dominance of events and things (possessions) to an "inner citadel" of self from which there is further withdrawal; body and mind must be brought under control of spirit, and this involves for some persons "ascetic practices"; 3) Emphasis on special "knowing," sometimes called by them "non-knowing" or "ignorance"; a like emphasis on illumination as an "inner light," which is the gift of

⁵⁰ Récéjac, E., *Essays on the Bases of the Mystic Knowledge*. Translated by S. C. Upton, p. 185.

⁵¹ Butler, Cuthbert, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

God; with this illumination, sometimes there is an inexpressible ecstasy; 4) Unshaken conviction on the part of the mystics that their experiences are real and make them participants in the primal source of truth and love. They possess what William James named "a curious sense of authority" which places them in an attitude of understanding the reasonableness and love of man as manifested in the institutions and sacraments of the Church, yet at the same time possessing a personal or individual knowledge through their oneness or union with God. For many of them there seems to be an understanding of things as they exist because of a knowledge of things as they really are.

Because of the difficulty recognized by mystics in finding adequate expression for their experiences, they use the word symbols current in their times, and they explain the experiences by analogies, such as of water, fire, sun, morning light, evening light, mountain, desert, nights, music, fragrance, marriage, and friendship. True mystics were and are men and women of ordinary Christian piety with a difference of intensity and of emphasis which makes them extraordinary.

1) To discuss briefly the profound belief of the mystic in the ultimate union of himself and God, with occasional fleeting "foretaste" of the same in this earthly life, let me begin with his basic idea that the world, i.e., all created things, is the expression of God's love. This is the common Christian belief; but the mystic particularly thinks of himself and all things as the continuous expression of God's creative love, not in time and space, but God expressing Himself in the eternal Now. Thomas Aquinas had recognized something beyond the union of reason and love (the natural powers of the soul) when he explained that as through his faculty of knowing man shares the divine knowledge by the virtue of faith and as through the faculty of will he shares the divine love by virtues of *caritas*, so by means of a "certain similitude" he shares in the divine nature through some regeneration or recreation.⁵² This certain similitude of which Thomas Aquinas wrote becomes for religious mystics the pivoting thought of their contemplation. This certain similitude, this image of God, is de-

⁵² Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, pars I, 11 qu. cx, art. 4.

fined specifically by them as "the nameless in the soul," "ground of soul," "ground of heart," "scintilla," "little spark," "apex of mind," "synteresis," and other similar terms chosen perhaps according to the understanding of their audience. It seems to be their guarantee of becoming God (deified or *vergottet*). The mysteries of the life and passion of Jesus Christ form usually a large part of their meditations for in Him are both God and man in perfect union. The Friends of God will show how some mystics developed the idea of union or oneness with God.

2) The ascetic attitude of the early German mystics is distinctly related to the general interest in poverty and their own need to withdraw from the world in order to "gather and renounce self" for the entering of God into their souls. It is in this attitude, however, that there arises certain manifestations whereby to distinguish true mystics from "bad company." In German, there are two words, *mystik* and *mysticismus*. In English, the word "mystic" is now and then used in the German sense of *mysticismus*, i.e., it is given to persons indulging in hysterical or hypnotic states, self-induced often by drugs or by an exercise cult. Sometimes the term "mystic" is given to persons of unstable mental or emotional life who only imitate the experiences of others. As Delacroix expresses it, "They are very far from the heroes of mysticism, the great mystics great in intelligence and in the power of life."⁵³ This does not mean to imply that great mystics are not nervous and ill at times. But it does admit that the experiences of "the bad company" result usually in a wild tangle of words and ideas and emotions, a tangle for good psychologists to unravel for us.⁵⁴ For the most part the mystic way involves an integration of the whole self. The German mys-

⁵³ Delacroix, H., *Études d'histoire et de psychologie du mysticisme. Les grands mystiques Chrétiens*, chap. x.

⁵⁴ "If our nervous systems are such that there is a close connection between all tender emotion and the sexual centers, then why reserve the judgment for mystics only," asks Montmorand, whose able articles on the mystic experiences and sexual self are in *Revue philos.*, Vols. LVI-LVIII, LX (1903-1905). The mystics are human and so are subject to whatever common laws of human existence science establishes. Hocking (*Meaning of God in Human Experience*, p. 369) speaks of mystics as "pioneers in psycho-analysis."

tics speak of "a gathering" of self which must come at the beginning of the Christian life. In achieving this integration and through communion with the Divine there are religious geniuses who become "constructors of life." Around them it is to be expected will be the lesser mystics *comme une pléiade de disciples inférieurs*⁵⁵ who are not bad company, but not great heroes.

3) One must admit that to talk of non-knowing, or ignorance, as superior to knowledge sounds irrational and queer. This emphasis on knowledge that is ignorance appears in the mystic strain from early times. One illustration must suffice. It is from the author known as pseudo-Dionysius. He speaks of

that most divine knowledge of God which takes place through ignorance in the union which is above intelligence when the intelligence quitting all things that are and then leaving itself is united to the superluculent rays being illuminated thence and therein by the unsearchable depth of wisdom.⁵⁶

St. Augustine describes how "step by step" he was led upwards . . . to the reasoning faculty . . . and with the flash of one trembling glance he arrived at "that which is." He straightway confesses that "he could not sustain this gaze but was relegated to his ordinary experience bearing with him a loving memory and a longing."⁵⁷ He described also three kinds of visions, the highest of which was intellectual like that of St. Paul's "third heaven." In this third heaven,

the mind is separated and removed and wholly withdrawn from the carnal senses and cleansed, so that those things which are in that heaven and the very substance of God and the Word . . . can be ineffably seen and heard.⁵⁸

With this sense of something beyond human reason, with this sense of light and of seeing truth, there is usually combined the experience of ecstasy. When St. Bernard describes in the con-

⁵⁵ Delacroix, *op. cit.*, p. 357.

⁵⁶ Dionysius, *De divisione nominum*, VII, 3. Trans. by Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁵⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, 23. Butler, *op. cit.*, in Prologue.

⁵⁸ Augustine, *De genes. ad litt.*, XII. Migne, *Patr. Lat.*, xxxiv. In the 12th chapter, Augustine discusses paradise and the third heaven. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

cluding chapter of *De diligendo Deo*, the state of union with God as "a sober inebriation filled with truth, not wine, not drenched with juice of grape but on fire with God,"⁵⁹ one can understand that misunderstandings arise. And likewise with the saying of Richard of St. Victor, a younger contemporary of Bernard, and known as a mystic, that he "was wounded with love."

4) Concerning the trait of "authority within" as shown by the mystics, it must suffice to say here that it is akin to, if not identical with, familiar expressions such as "I know that my Redeemer liveth," and with the attitude of master-knowers who believe that they have experienced what they know. In true mystics it is not "intellectual pride" as it may seem to be. Humility in relation to God and man is usually the cardinal virtue of mystic love.

Frequently this mystic knowledge seems to be juxtaposed to the knowledge of the learned as surpassing it. Even unlettered folk often claim superior knowledge through this illumination, this inner light. This seeming opposition became in recent centuries an academic controversy concerning the relation of scholasticism and mysticism. According to the late Adolf Harnack, to whom mysticism was Catholic piety deepened or heightened, the discussion of the question of scholasticism versus mysticism was marked "by confusion and weariness." To him "mysticism was the presupposition of scholasticism."⁶⁰

The sense of authority is certainly related to inner conviction based on personal experience. It gives rise in the teachings and writings of mystics to "It is written," or "certain masters teach," "but I say unto you." Part of this seeming certitude of the truth must be ascribed to their disciples who accept them as masters; and part to the listeners who do not understand. In this connection I like Bernard's statement (whether in self-defense or in self-sufficiency, who can say?):

Even as he who knows not Greek understands not one speaking Greek, and as he who knows not Latin, understands not one

⁵⁹ Bernard, *De diligendo Deo*, chap. xi.

⁶⁰ Harnack, *op. cit.*, Vol. VI.

speaking Latin, so to him who loves not, the language of love is barbarous.⁶¹

The Union of Reason and Love in the Quest for God

As major strains in the spiritual inheritance of the Friends of God who lived in the chaotic fourteenth century, various developments of Reason and Love and their union in great minds and hearts have been stressed. Evidences of the mystic strain in great Christians, as something distinct from, though a very part of, the union of Reason and Love have been indicated. It is really God who is inherited by leaders as well as by "the giant people" of the Middle Ages. God was the supreme end of knowing and of loving, the beginning of life and the goal of all striving and the meaning of all living. To understand fully the medieval heart and mind one must go back to the great Augustine (354-430) who dominated the religious thinking of Europe for a thousand years or more. The Friends of God follow soon after Thomas Aquinas (canonized 1323), but they are too close to him. They know St. Augustine better. They were acquainted with the fervor of his heart as revealed in lyric passages as Augustine's lament:

Too late did I love thee! For behold Thou wert within and I without . . . I unlovely rushed heedlessly among the things of beauty Thou madest. Thou wert with me but I was not with Thee . . . *Thou didst call and cry aloud and forced open my deafness.*⁶²

The Friends of God also understood Augustine's prayer:

I invoke Thee O God the Truth in whom and from whom and by whom are true all the things that are true. . . . For where I found truth, there found I my God who is the Truth itself.⁶³

⁶¹ Bernard, *Canticum Canticorum*, LXXII. Also in a charming letter written in 1146 to St. Hildegard of Bingen on the Rhine evidently in reply to her praise of him, Bernard writes: "It seems to me that certain persons think very differently of so humble a person as myself, from that which my own conscience knows to be true and that it is to be attributed not to my merits but the simplicity of mankind. . . ." Migne, *Patr. Lat.* Vol. CLXXXII.

⁶² Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. X, CXXVII.

⁶³ Augustine, *Soliloquies* I, 3: *Confessions*, Bk. X, CXXIV.

To them also,

Wisdom that is contemplation consists in the knowledge and love of that which always is and unchangeably abides, namely, God.⁶⁴

They particularly understood,

Who shall understand, who shall express God? What is it that comes thus by moments to shine into the eyes of my soul and make my heart beat with fear and love? It is *something quite other than myself*, and for this reason I am frozen with terror; it is something identical with myself and therefore I am kindled with love.⁶⁵

Also in the heritage of the Friends of God is St. Anselm (1033-1109). He is sometimes called "the last of the Church fathers and the first of the scholastics." There is a very beautiful passage expressing the quest for God in the first chapter of his *Proslogium*, which contains much of the medieval mind and heart:

Let me seek Thee in longing, let me long for Thee in seeking; let me find Thee in love and love Thee in finding. Lord, I acknowledge and I thank Thee that Thou hast created me in thine image in order that I may be mindful of Thee, may conceive of Thee and love Thee; but the image has been so consumed and wasted away by vices, and obscured by the smoke of wrong-doing, that it cannot achieve that for which it was made except Thou renew it, and create it anew. I do not endeavor, O Lord, to penetrate thy sublimity, for in no wise do I compare my understanding with that; but I long to understand in some degree thy truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand that I may believe but I believe in order to understand. For this also I believe, that unless I believed, I should not understand.⁶⁶

Dante stands at the turn into the century in which the Friends of God (*Gottesfreunde*) lived. His masterpiece like that of St.

⁶⁴ Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, CXXXV, 8. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁶⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 9.

⁶⁶ Anselm, *Proslogium*. Trans. by Deane, chap. i, vi-vii. See Migne, *Patr. Lat.*, CLVIII. The passage is more effective in Latin than in translation. *Non tento, Domine, penetrare altitudinem tuam; quia nulla tenus comparo illi intellectum meum, sed desidero aliquatenus intelligere veritatem tuam quam credit et amat cor meum.*

Thomas is also recognized as a *summa* of reasoned Catholic thought and piety, only it is in poetry.

It is of particular interest that in Dante's *Paradiso* appear Thomas Aquinas, the Dominican praising St. Francis, and Bonaventura, Franciscan, praising St. Dominic. Bonaventura says,

It is fit that where one is the other be
Led in, so that as they united warred
Likewise together may their glory shine.

Two champions at whose doings, at whose words
The people gone astray correct themselves.⁶⁷

In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, all three strains are found, so that the author can be studied as a scholastic, as a lover, and as a mystic. His praise of human intellect is seen in the following:

When it said that a man is living it should be understood that man is using reason, which is his special life and the act of his most noble part. And therefore he who severs himself from reason and uses only his sensitive part, lives not as a man but as a beast.⁶⁸

The idea of the possible closeness between God and man may be illustrated from *Paradiso*, where Bonaventura's associates in heaven are Franciscans,

Illuminato and Agostino are here
Who were among the first unsandled poor
That in the cord made themselves friends to God.⁶⁹

Not much has been quoted to show wherein the union of Reason and Love is effected. In the medieval conception of God, it is the idea that God as perfect goodness is the object that finally satisfies both reason and love. This idea is specifically stated by Dante in a passage which can well conclude the chapter:

For good as being good is grasped no sooner
But it enkindles love, and so much more

⁶⁷ *Paradiso*, XII, 34-36, 44-45. Trans. by Henry Johnson.

⁶⁸ *Convivio*, 11, 8. Translated by Edmund Gardner.

⁶⁹ *Paradiso*, XII, 130-132. "In the cord" refers to the monk's girdle and signifies no doubt the vows of life service.

As it has more of goodness in itself.
Hence, to the Being so pre-excellent
That every good which is outside of It
Is but a beam of its own radiance,
More than to any other must the mind
Of each one who discerns the truth whereon
This argument is based be moved in love.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ *Paradiso*, Translated by Henry Johnson, XXVI, 28-36.

CHAPTER III

MEISTER ECKHART

In the early history of German religious thought and near the beginnings of German language and literature is Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1327), a great personality, shrouded through the ages in mists of tradition and clouded by scholarly disputes. He is like an outstanding mountain peak which more than others in the range is singled out and loved by a people. Though his teachings lay hidden in manuscripts scattered in German monasteries, the reality and strength of the man persisted through the centuries. He was there, though not intimately known. We have no authentic biography; it must be reconstructed from records of the Dominican order, from the rich tradition, from a study of scholarly disputes and agreements, and especially from a close study of Eckhart's writings in relation to the times in which he lived.

The mists which shroud the peak and obscure it from our sight are varied. They may be briefly indicated as follows:

1) Eckhart lived before books were printed. He studied and wrote in Latin. He also taught in the vernacular of his hearers speculative ideas hitherto expressed only in Latin or Greek or Arabic. He was like other men of his day self-effacing as to authorship. His hearers, mostly monks and nuns, wrote down the sermons for their devotional use, i.e., they kept notebooks. In the copying of the manuscripts in order to send them to patrons or to other monasteries and convents, the original texts were often "verschlimmert bessert" (made worse through improvement), as Jostes expresses it.¹

2) In the estimating of the value of these notebooks, the fact that many of the medieval nuns knew Latin and sometimes wrote in Latin is overlooked. A papal bull² of 1329 issued two years

¹ Jostes, *Meister Eckhart und seine Jünger*. Ungedruckte Texte.

² Bull, *In agro dominico* . . . found in German in Lehmann, W., *Meister*

after Eckhard's death, condemned certain sentences taken from his writings as "heretical" and others as "sounding evil." The introduction stated that "a certain Ekkardus, doctor of Holy Scriptures and teacher in the Dominican Order wished to be wiser than was fitting for him and turned his ear from truth to phantasies." The conclusion of the same papal document stated that "toward the end of his life, making profession of the Catholic faith, he [Eckhart] retracted the twenty-six aforesaid articles which he avowed to have preached; and at the same time [he retracted] all that he had written or taught in lesson or in sermons which could engender in the spirit of the faithful, a heretical or erroneous sense."

3) It can readily be seen how such a document appearing after the death of a Master whose passion for truth was such that he said, if God Himself should turn away from the truth, he would cling to the truth (but he added "God is truth") would affect Eckhart's status in the Church.³ For centuries his Latin writings remained unknown; and as stated above, his German sermons were mostly in the notebooks of his hearers. The matter was left to drift obscurely into history.

The subsequent Reformation controversies and the enthusiastic attempts on the part of later Protestant scholars to claim Eckhart, Tauler, Suso, and "der Frankfurter" (author of *Eine deutsche Theologie*) as forerunners of Protestantism must also be taken into consideration in accounting for the long obscurity of Eckhart. With such conflicting emotions and theories, arguments arose as to whether Eckhart was scholastic or not, orthodox or heretical, church mystic or otherwise, wholly medieval or at the dawn of the modern era. Doubtless, part of the difficulty lay in finding acceptable and accurate terms to define where Eckhart and his followers diverged, if at all, from orthodox thought and piety. It must also be admitted that there is wanting in Eckhart detailed

Eckhart. Introduction, pp. 14-18. Latin in "Archiv franz. für Literatur und Kirchengeschichte des Mittelalters," Vol. XI.

³ Pfeiffer, *Meister Eckhart*, 4th ed., photostat of 1857 edition, p. 57. *Warheit ist als eden, wêre daz sich got gekêren mohte von der wârheit, ich wollte mich an die wârheit beften und wollte got lâzen, wan got ist diu wârheit.*

"schematization" of his thought. These three considerations alone are enough to account for the difficulty of finding the historical Eckhart. Yet it may be well to illustrate the contrasting judgments of modern writers on Eckhart.

By German scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Meister Eckhart was variously called: "the father of German speculation and mysticism";⁴ "the father of German theology"; "the father of German prose"; "the forerunner of the Reformation and an evangelical spirit";⁵ "the originator of German idealism."⁶ It is the essential Germanness of Eckhart which these titles emphasize.

Heinrich Suso Denifle rejected what he called the too *begeistert* (enthusiastic) German judgments concerning Eckhart's originality. He referred to a contemporary Diedrich of Freiburg, to the popular Berthold of Regensburg, and to Mechthild of Magdeburg in the previous generation and their use of the vernacular German. On the other hand, the finding of Latin writings⁷ evidently Eckhart's by Denifle at Erfurt in 1880 marked a decided (*epochmachend*) change in the discussions. In these Latin writings was found irrefutable evidence that Eckhart was basically scholastic and church mystic. But *Toute le monde, pourtant, n'a plus suivi Denifle dans sa conclusion principale* (everyone does not accept Denifle's principal conclusion).⁸ To Büttner, editor of Eckhart's writings,⁹ Meister Eckhart bears the same relation to the history of the German "*Geist*" as Dante to the Italian. The author of the article in the last edition (1928) of Ueberweg regrets that "to this very hour the polemic continues as to whether Eckhart is pure scholastic or pure mystic instead of seeing the distinctive factor in his speculation."¹⁰

⁴ Bach, Joseph, *Meister Eckhart; der Vater der deutschen Speculation*.

⁵ Preger, W., *Geschichte der deutschen Mystik im Mittelalter*. 3 vols.

⁶ Lasson, A., *Meister Eckhart der Mystiker*.

⁷ Denifle, *Meister Eckhart's lateinische Schriften*, "Archiv für Literatur und Kirchengeschichte des Mittelalters," Vol. II.

⁸ Vernet, F., in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, Vol. IV, col. 2068.

⁹ Büttner, H., *Meister Eckharts Schriften und Predigten*, aus dem Mittelhochdeutschen übersetzt (2d ed.). 2 vols.

¹⁰ Article on Eckhart by Joseph Quint in Ueberweg, *Die patristische und scholastische Philosophie*. p. 562.

Nevertheless, despite controversy progress has been made in establishing a critical view of the primary sources available for the study of Eckhart. In 1857 Franz Pfeiffer after eighteen years of careful research in the field of German mysticism of the fourteenth century assembled one hundred and ten sermons, eighteen tracts, sixty-eight sayings, as belonging to Eckhart.¹¹ These furnished the basis for possible groupings of sermons, for placing them in Eckhart's career, and for comparison with other manuscripts, especially with the known Latin writings. One of the most important of Eckhart's writings, his *Defense Writing* in Latin was published only in 1923. Today our sure sources for the study of Eckhart's teachings are:

1. Four Sermons on *The Birth of God in the Soul*, important in that they are in Latin and in German and contain the most characteristic teaching of Eckhart.

2. *Das Buch der frommen Tröstungen*, or, *Der göttlichen Tröstungen* (The Book of Divine Consolations). It is mentioned in Eckhart's *Defense Writing*. It was probably written by Eckhart for Agnes, Queen of Hungary, patroness of the Dominican Order.

3. Latin writings *Opus tripartitum*, in 3 parts: Liber propositionum, Liber quaestionum, Liber expositionum. (About 120 sermons and fragments.)

4. The papal Bull of 1329, with the twenty-eight sentences from Eckhart's teachings.

5. The *Defense Writing*, in Latin (probably no Latin title), referred to as *Recht-fertigungsschrift* in German. This next to the four sermons is probably the most important source.

6. *Die rede der unterscheidunge*, table talks in Eckhart's own words given when he was prior in Erfurt before 1300. These treat "of true obedience," "of a free spirit," "of inner independence," "of being and action," "of the possession of God," and so on—all topics on which a teaching monk would instruct younger brothers.

7. Fragments from a commentary on the Gospel of St. John—*Diu glose über das evangelium S. Johannes*.

¹¹ Pfeiffer, F., *op. cit.*, English translation by C. de B. Evans.

8. Other sermons published by Sievers, Jundt, Jostes, and others. Jostes published three sermons which he thinks Friedrich von Amberg, "evidently a conscientious collector," brought about 1400 to a Franciscan monastery.

As secondary sources, we have the *a*) many sermons which belong according to tradition to Eckhart; *b*) *Schwester Katrei*, now classified as secondary but for years considered Eckhart's; *c*) legends and sayings.¹²

The present chapter does not presume to be a comprehensive critical study of Eckhart. It is intended to be critical in its use of sources, authorities, and the like, but considers Eckhart chiefly in the aspect of an important influence upon the Friends of God. For this reason Eckhart was introduced as the outstanding peak—the highest in the mountain range in which appear Tauler, Suso, Ruysbroeck, "der Frankfurter," and other German mystics, who in the half century following Eckhart defined the idea of "God's friends" more sharply than it is found in Eckhart's writings. (The idea and ideals of friendship between God and the soul are interwoven with Eckhart's speculation concerning the relation between the Creator and his creature, man. Tauler and Suso and the others reflect in the main Eckhart's speculation.)

In the first chapter of this study, the background of the troubled century in which the Friends of God appeared was given in broad lines. In the second chapter, their general intellectual and spiritual inheritance was indicated. Here, their immediate horizon is brought into focus with Meister Eckhart, the dominating teacher in the Rhine valley during the first quarter of the century.

The known facts in Meister Eckhart's life are based mostly on Dominican records. Some few can be based on internal evi-

¹² The present writer is responsible for translations made either from modern German as in Lehmann and Büttner, or the original as in Pfeiffer. Sources 1, 2, 4, 6 are in Lehmann; Source 5 was studied in Daniels, *Eine lateinische Rechtfertigungsschrift des Meister Eckhart* in "Beiträge zur Gesch., der Phil. des Mittelalters," Vol. XXIII, Münster, 1923. Source 3 in Denifle, see footnote 7. See also Strauch, P., *Meister Eckhart's Buch von der göttlichen Tröstungen und von dem edlen Menschen*; for *Schwester Katrei*, see Denifle in *Hist. polit. Blätter*, LXXV (1875), 924 ff. and *Zeit. für deutsches Alterthum*, XXI, 142.

dence of his writings, though for the most part these seem to be addressed to persons of all time. The Dominicans accepted students as novices at the age of sixteen. The record of his becoming a priest in 1285 enables us to figure according to prescribed study for the priesthood two years as a novice; two years (later was extended to a three-year course) in *studium logicale* (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectics); two years in *studium naturale* (arithmetic, mathematics, astronomy, music); three years in theology (Bible for one year and the Lombard Sentences for two years). So in figuring back one conjectures that Eckhart was born about 1260.

Eckhart as a young priest was assigned to the Erfurt Dominican monastery. He became prior there in 1286. For the next four years he was a successful vicar in Erfurt and throughout Thuringia. In 1300 he was sent for *studium generale* (graduate study) to the Dominican school in Paris. He became *magister* in 1302, and is known thereafter as "Meister Eckhart." In some manuscripts he is "Meister Eckhart von Hochheim" (probably his birthplace in Thuringia), but more often "Meister Eckhart von Paris." Very often a fragment has simply the heading "meister egghart spricht."

Upon leaving Paris, Meister Eckhart was made Dominican provincial prior of Saxony in which at the time were fifty-one monasteries and nine convents of the Order. He was reëlected in 1307. Bohemia was added to his territory for supervision. This addition of responsibility and the reëlection were tributes to his administrative ability.

We know that Eckhart taught next in Strassburg, and then in Cologne. It is tradition and not established fact that while in Strassburg¹³ charges of heresy were made against Eckhart. It is fact, that in 1326 the Franciscan archbishop, Heinrich von Virneburg (referred to in Chapter I as determined to rid Cologne of heretics) started an investigation of Eckhart's relation to Beguines and Beghards in Cologne. Eckhart appealed to Pope John XXII, then resident in Avignon. The Pope who in 1323 had appointed

¹³ Denifle, *Acte zum Prozesse Meister Ekebarts* in "Archiv für Literatur und Kirchengeschichte," II, 619 ff.

the Dominican Nicholas of Strassburg as supervisor in the German provinces, now asked him to investigate and to report concerning the charges made against Eckhart. Nicholas straightway freed Eckhart of the charge of heresy. The archbishop (Franciscan) then summoned Eckhart (Dominican) to his own ecclesiastical court.

About "a hundred sentences" from his writings were questioned. In October, 1326, Eckhart wrote his defense in Latin, protesting that his life and teaching were acclaimed by the brothers of his Order and by the people generally. He pointed out that the writings of St. Thomas and Master Brother Albertus and of early churchmen had also been examined "as though suspicious and erroneous." Early in the carefully prepared defense, Eckhart wrote *si quid tamen in promissis aut in aliis dictis meis aut scriptis falsum esset, quod ego non video, semper paratus sum sensui cedere meliori. . . . Errare enim possum hereticus esse non possum, nam primum ad intellectum pertinet, secundum ad voluntatem.* (For I am able to err. I am not able to be heretical, for the first pertains to intellect, the second to the will.)

Some of the sentences, he states, he never said. Others on first sight "sound badly." We find once at least, "I have said this recently, but it was poorly thought out" (*intellectum*); or "This is true and to deny it is ignorance" (*verum est et hoc negare rude est*), and then he explains the truth of the statement, and quotes the Scriptures or Church Fathers.¹⁴

On January 24, 1327, Eckhart accompanied by fellow Dominicans went to the local court, defended himself, challenged the archbishop to have him invited to the papal court of Avignon, where he would "defend himself before the world." On the thirteenth of February in the Dominican church in Cologne after the sermon, Brother Konrad von Halberstadt read a Latin exposition of Eckhart's teachings, and then an explanation in German, sentence by sentence, was carefully made by Eckhart. This public declaration and defense gave ground for the statement in the final pontifical bull that Eckhart had retracted. We have evidence of

¹⁴ Daniels, *op. cit.*, p. 2, 15, 19, etc. In his defense Eckhart quotes Augustine 15 times, St. Thomas 6 times, Aristotle 3 times, Bernard 3 times, Avicenna 3 times, Gregory 2 times.

personal animosities on the part of disgruntled Brothers, Hermann de Summo and Wilhelm, also Dominicans, who after Eckhart's death, went to Avignon "under cloak of pushing the heresy charge against Master Eckhart, of whose faith and holy life however neither he [Hermann] nor any other who knew him [Eckhart] ought to doubt."¹⁵ In these words the Procurator General of the Dominican Order begged "the most holy and most benign and most just father" (the Pope) to punish the two, Hermann and Wilhelm. As I ponder over these records, the heretical charges seem a tragic close to a great teaching career. Eckhart was spared the experience of knowing that in 1329, in the papal bull—*In agro dominico*—John XXII, "with pain" declared him to have been deceived by "the father of lies" into scattering thorns and thistles among "the faithful," particularly "the simple folk." We have no record of Eckhart's life after his public defense in Cologne in 1327.

The twenty-six sentences quoted from Eckhart in the papal bull are found in his Latin and German teachings. They can be summarized. The first three refer to his theory of the eternity of the world as expressed in statements such as, "As soon as God was, the world was created"; and "in the same moment that God was and created His son eternally like Him, He created also the world." Other sentences considered heretical referred to God's honor being reflected in the evil as well as in the good; and to the idea of spiritual poverty according to which "God is honored most by persons who renounce everything, even Heaven." In three sentences, man's nature is exalted in such teachings as, "Whatever the Holy Scriptures say about Christ is fully realized in each good and holy person. We become fully transformed and changed in God in the same way as in the Sacrament, the bread is changed into the Body of Christ. By the living God this is true . . . there is no distinction."

To the twenty-six sentences there were added two teachings with which Eckhart was charged. In these two teachings are ideas related to the beliefs of the Beguines and Beghards and other

¹⁵ "Denifle, *Aktenstücke zu Meister Eckhart's Process*. "Zeitschrift für deutsches Alterthum," Vol. XXIX (1885).

free sects against whom the Franciscan archbishop was moving. It is certain that Beguines and Beghards differed greatly in their beliefs largely according to their varied education and culture. Some of them were less heretical than others. Many followed the teachings of the Dominican or Franciscan orders and finally became tertiaries of the orders. The most disputed point in Eckhart's teaching is in the first of these two doctrines, namely whether or not he taught that there is "something uncreated in each soul." Whether or not the sentences in the papal bull are fairly representative of Eckhart's teachings raises a difficulty which will appear in the later discussions of his teachings. There is no denying the fact that there is lacking clear schematization of Eckhart's thought, as stated above; and further, that the resemblances between his thought and ideas of less scholarly "free sects" combined with his intellectual enthusiasm in teaching opened the way to the charge of heresy.

Eckhart's philosophical thought, taken as a whole, is part of the common texture of scholasticism. As a young Dominican in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, he was certainly influenced by the great Dominican Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas. This means that he speculated concerning the nature and being of God, the *rationes* of things and of creatures in God, concerning creation, concerning God's expression of Himself and His Son and the implications of the same for all humanity, and other matters common to scholastic thought. The recurrence of statements concerning the relative value of reason and will, or of reason and love, together with the primacy given to reason shows that Eckhart did not separate himself from scholastic disputes though he may often seem indifferent.¹⁶ But there must have been something distinctive in Eckhart's teaching, else why misunderstandings and controversies to this very day?

Eckhart's most distinctive teaching and the one of first importance in its influence on the Friends of God is his treatment of the relation between man and God in virtue of "the spark" (*synteresis*) in the soul of man. This makes possible his "Thou—I," the direct intimate relationship between God and man character-

¹⁶ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, p. 224; Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

istic of the mystic. This spark seems to be the working ground between God and man. It can be understood only in the light of Eckhart's speculation about God. In reviewing Eckhart's main teachings we begin then with his speculation about God.

"Twenty-four masters came together to discuss what God is, and they could not"¹⁷—this sentence opens a sermon on the nature of the Being of God. Two main ideas which Eckhart emphasizes many times are:

1. *Esse est deus, or Gott ist überwesen.*¹⁸ To be is God, or God is pure being. In his Latin writings Eckhart distinguished between *essentia* and *existentia* as included in *esse*. In German, *Wesen* covers both ideas. Eckhart explains:

We understand *Wesen* as pure and naked being as it is in itself. Then is Being higher than knowledge and life; for in that it is being, it includes knowledge and life.¹⁹

Eckhart recognizes the scholastic distinction between *essentia in se* and *essentia cum relatione*. He uses corresponding terms *unabhängige Natur* and *gebundene Natur*.²⁰

2. *Deus = Eius = Unus*. The insistence on this unity, or oneness, of God and Being, this singleness, closes for Eckhart all possible gap between God transcendent and God immanent. To be sure, the distinction between Godhead and God was common in medieval theology, and Eckhart kept repeating it, but at the same time reiterated the idea of the unity of God, so that his view has been called the way of *Einheitslehre* (the seeing of Unity).²¹ One might indicate Eckhart's distinction between Godhead and God as follows:

Godhead = *Deitas* = *Eius* = *Übersein* = One = Absolute = *Die Ungebundene Natur* = Nothing = Incomprehensible *Ich* (I am that I am) = Everlasting Now.

God = *Deus* = *Eius* = *Sein* = Trinity = *Die Gebundene Natur* = Creator = Everlasting Process.

¹⁷ Sermon, "Gott das Über-sein," Lehmann, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

¹⁸ Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

¹⁹ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

²⁰ Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 537.

²¹ Rudolf, Otto, *West-Östliche Mytik*.

Godhead is nameless, formless, absolute one, "single stillness." The very fact of his oneness makes Him *per se* actus. He is changeless, yet all change has its source in Him. "From this immovableness all things are moved and all supernatural things receive life,"²² God loves for his own self (*um seiner selbst willen*); that means he loves for love's sake and creates for the sake of creating. He loves and creates without ceasing. *Tag ist seine Natur, sein Wissen, sein Leben, seine Seligkeit.*²³ In a sermon commemorating holy martyrs, Eckhart says,

In God there is no death; all things in him become living. . . .²⁴ Yes, God himself does not rest in that he is the beginning. Moreover he rests there where there is an end and the resting of all being. Not that this being there [at the end] becomes nothing; rather, it fulfills its highest perfection.²⁵

When Eckhart speaks of "God becoming" and "not becoming" (*Gott werdend und werdend*) or says that "Before the creatures were, God was not God" or the same stated positively *Indem Gott nicht anwesend, wird Gott* one readily understands why he was misunderstood. Once after he had said, "If I were not, God also were not," he added, "it is not necessary to understand this"—just as if he were aware of restlessness among his hearers.²⁶

It is interesting to find Eckhart teaching against a thought-out God (*gedachten Gott*):

One should not have a theoretical God and be satisfied therewith, for when the thought vanishes, God vanishes also; but one should have a real existing (*aktuelle* = being) God who stands high above all thinking of man and all creatures.²⁷

The more you are without theories (*Vorstellungen*) of God, the more receptive you are for his in-working (*Einwirken*) and the more you are turned within and forgetful of self, the nearer you are to this [the birth of God in the soul].²⁸

²² Lehmann, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

²³ Bütner, *op. cit.*, II, 186.

²⁴ "Alles dir werdend lebende in ihm." Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

²⁵ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

²⁶ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 240, 241: 185.

²⁷ "Denn wenn der Gedanke vergeht, vergeht auch der Gott . . ." Lehmann, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

²⁸ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

The soul has something in itself, a spark of knowledge beyond reason, that never goes out (*nimmer verlischt*).²⁹

This is the spark which is so near God that it is a single same One with Him and carries in itself the image (*Bild*) of all creatures.³⁰

He who remains in God has five things. The first, that between him and God there is no difference but they are one. . . . The three persons in God are three in number, but this is their manifoldness. But between man and God is alone no difference; no manifoldness but a oneness.³¹

See, in man, in whom all creatures end and in whom are gathered all manifoldness into a unity in Christ; there, man becomes one with God in Christ's humanity.³²

Thus it appears how close the image of God in man's soul is to God's essence. Often it seems as if Eckhart were saying that man can become God's son as Jesus Christ was. Selections can be made in which there is this definite claim. Thus he says, "If it is true that God became man [in Christ] then it is also true that man became God."³³ But in his *Defense Writing* he says explicitly that the image in Christ alone is uncreated and of the same quality as in the Father. Passages could be quoted in which Eckhart clearly taught that as long as the soul of man retains anything of creature, it is really distinct even when it has the experience of union with God. Eckhart has thus two bases for his idea of union of the soul with God, namely, the "image," or "spark," or "ground" in the soul; and the person of Christ.

Historically, man's question as to whether the Creator is far removed and transcendent or close to man and immanent seems

²⁹ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

³⁰ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

³¹ *Zwischen dem menschen und gote ist alleine niht underscheit, mër: da ist ouch kein menige, da ist niht wan ein.* Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

³² *Sehent alsô geschibt ez umbe den menschen, in dem alle créature endent und an dem gesamnet werdent alliu manicvaltigin dinc in ein einekeit an Kristo: dâ wirt man ein an gote mit Kristi menscheit.* Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 522.

³³ *Wan also war dez ist daz gote menschen worden ist, alsô war ist der mensche got werden.* Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

to appear in some form in every age and religion. Within the Hebrew history, God is at first near and intimate with man, then far and approached through intermediaries, again close and personal, and so on. Jesus spoke of God the Father whose will was to be done on earth as in heaven, and at the same time of a God so within himself that the two were one. The gospel of John which emphasizes the oneness of God and Jesus also speaks of the oneness of Jesus' disciples with Father and Son. This had particular interest for Eckhart and his followers. It was the guarantee, so to speak, of the friendship of God and of man's possible perfection.)

A long tradition lies back of the idea of "the spark"—it is too long to be reviewed here.³⁴ Another word of long standing and of uncertain origin is *synteresis*, which is often used as synonymous with spark. In religious usage this latter term seems to go back to an interpretation of Ezekiel's "face of the eagle." The idea in both terms is related to "the kingdom of God within you" and to Augustine's *In te ipsum redi, in interiore est veritas*.³⁵ In medieval writings, the spark seems to have a double meaning: a) the ground of the soul; and b) the highest ethical faculty of man like the conscience, or a habit of the intellect which distinguishes between good and ill. With some as with Bonaventura it was a habit of the will. Albertus Magnus in various writings defined and redefined the term.³⁶ Hermann von Fritzlar (c. 1350) in his *Buch von der heiligen Leben* lists a dozen or more synonyms commonly used for spark.³⁷ While for some scholastics, the spark might be the remnant of the original divinity left in man after his fall, for Eckhart and his followers it is the ground of the soul.

One other idea is involved in this spark and ground of the soul. It is the close relation between the spark and the idea of becoming God (*vergottet*). To what degree does one become God? Entirely? Such a question is usually involved in all ideas

³⁴ Meerpohl, Franz, Meister Eckhart's Lehre vom seelen Funklein. *Abhandlungen zur Philosophie und Psychologie der Religion* (1926).

³⁵ Augustine, *De vera religione*, chap. xxxix, n. 72.

³⁶ Albertus Magnus. *Summa theol.* Pt. II, qu 99.

³⁷ See Wackernagel, *Alteutsches Lesebuch*.

of union between God and man, whether the thinker be St. Bernard or Eckhart. Bernard uses analogies which Eckhart and his followers use, such as, the drop of water mingled in wine passing away utterly into the taste and color of the wine; or of iron in the fire becoming most like fire or as the air flooded with the light of the sun.³⁸ Eckhart in using these analogies seems to imply not so much union as a Oneness even in the essence. The Being (*Wesen*) of God transforms the soul by means of the spark. One difficulty in understanding Eckhart lies in determining whether he taught that the spark was uncreated; he seems at times to identify "spark" with "ground" of the soul which he says is something *ganz anders* (utterly different) from that which is created. It is in this ground that God works, creates persons as sons of God; it is here that he restores man to what he was originally.³⁹ "How does God the Father bear his Son in the soul? As creatures think—in theories and parables? No, indeed, but quite in the way that He bears or creates in Eternity, no less and no more."⁴⁰ And because of the ground and the spark, Eckhart found in all reasonable creatures (*vernunftigen creaturen*) a chasing-after (*nachjagen*) God.

It can readily be seen from this conception of the ground of the soul that the seeking of God must be within the soul and not in the external world. The latter way (before the birth of God in man's soul) leads only to the confusion of manifoldness from which man must will to turn to a oneness and singleness of self. And this attained, he wills to turn also from himself; *er entwind*, he becomes not, in order to be *gebildet* or formed over by God. All personal desires and willing must be left; one be-

³⁸ Gardner, E. G. *The Book of Saint Bernard on the Love of God*, pp. 102, 103.

³⁹ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, p. 122. *Gott ist dasselbe Eine, das ich bin.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 140. Eckhart continues by asking *Aber wie gebiert er da? Höret! Gottvater eignet ein voelkommenes Hineinschauen in sich selbst und ein abgründiges volles Erkennen seiner selbst durch sich selbst, ohne alle Vorstellungen. Und dadurch gebiert Gottvater eben seinen Sohn unter voller Einheit mit seiner göttlichen Natur. Seht, und in derselben und keiner andern Weise gebiert Gottvater seinen Sohn in der Seele Grund und Wesen und vereint sich so mit ihr.*

comes nothing, which is, returning to the nakedness of his original self; then God must enter. (This distinction between self and the naked self resembles that made between God and Godhead, as explained above. Godhead from man's point of view appears as nothing but in reality He is all-being. With this idea of the naked self or pure self is linked "the true poverty" or indifference to the world of creatures which is the basis for the "true humility" of which Eckhart and his followers preach.)

Since the question of poverty divided the Franciscan Order, since the rising social classes questioned the value of poverty, and since the Church itself collected as many taxes as possible, it is well to consider the kind of poverty which Eckhart preached. It is a kind usually misunderstood by moderns who look upon it as man's "worm-idea of self." Eckhart and his immediate followers meant it as a denial of the self that sticks in the realm of things and events instead of coming to the knowledge of the true individual naked self which having nothing yet possesses all things. From one of his authentic sermons on the text, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," the following quotation is made:

There are two kinds of poverty. First of all, an outer: which is good and praiseworthy in a person who willingly and for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ practices it just because He practiced it on earth . . . there is another poverty within, of which this word of our Master must be understood, Blessed are the poor in Spirit. . . .

Some persons have asked what is poverty? I shall answer. Bishop Albrecht (Albertus Magnus) says, "He is a poor person who has no satisfaction in anything or all things that God has yet created"—and that is well said. But we shall say it better and understand poverty in yet a higher way—he is a poor person who wills nothing, knows nothing, and has nothing. On these three points I wish to speak. . . . Some folks understand this [wishing nothing] falsely, who with acts of penance and outward practices hold fast to their own way. God pity that such folks are held in high esteem. How little they understand divine truth! These persons are holy according to their outward appearance; within they are asses for they grasp not the decisive conception of divine truth. . . . These

persons do not mean ill, for their purpose is good but that we should praise them for this reason, God forbid! . . . These persons are not poor. Do not copy them. If one asks what it means, that a poor person is one who wishes nothing, I answer: So long as a person is in the position that it lies in his will . . . to fulfill the most desirable will of God, he has not the poverty of which I wish to speak, for this person has yet a will. . . . If a person would be truly poor, he must be so free from his created will as if it did not exist. And I tell you by the eternal truth as long as you have wills to fulfill God's will, and as long as you have any longing for eternal life and for God, so long you are not really poor. For he alone is poor, who wishes nothing, knows nothing, desires nothing.⁴¹

This long quotation illustrates the zeal of the teacher who simplifies and explains what he learned from the masters, and who, in concise yet intimate terms, reveals freely and frankly his own thinking.

Eckhart, like his contemporary Dante, seems compelled to share what he knows about the way from misery to felicity. He shares with a conviction of personal experience which labors to make itself understood. He begins one sermon on "The Spark" with

As I was coming here today I was considering how I could preach so clearly that you would understand me; and there occurred to me this simile. If you really could understand this, you would understand the meaning and ground of all my thought that I have ever preached.⁴²

At the close of another sermon, he adds the weight of his conviction to his exposition by saying, "What I have said is true; I call the truth to witness and my soul as a pledge."⁴² A certain characteristic impatience with his listeners is shown in "He who does not understand this should complain of his blindness and not blame me or God's truth."⁴² It may be this same impatient spirit which teaches, ("There is no better advice to man than to find God there where he has left Him.")

Often his sentences are short commands which his hearers must have long remembered,

⁴¹ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 178 ff.

⁴² Lehmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 259, 177, 128.

Habe Gott allzeit im Herze!

(Have God always in your heart!)

Sorge dass Gott dir alles werde!

(See to it that God becomes everything to you!)

Darauf setze all dein studieren dass Gott dir gross werde.

(Concentrate all your study to the end that God become great for you.)

For a teacher who advocated withdrawal from the world of things and from self, to await in the ground of the soul the working of God, these commands and urgings may seem to imply too great a stress on man's will. For instance, "So then if you *will*, all things are yours and God. Lay off yourself and all things and everything which you have in yourself and seek that which you are in God."⁴³ Careful reading of Eckhart's sermons shows that these commands and emphasis on the will lie in the teacher's concept and conviction of the mutual need of God and man for each other. Man is not a passive instrument to be used by his Creator. In the creation of man, there was placed in the depths of his being "a ground" or "the ground." There was placed "a spark" or "the spark." Thus Eckhart taught philosophically. And he taught practically over and over again, "When God finds you prepared, He must work and pour Himself into you." And this God who

has a thousand times more need of you than you of Him . . . is God as He eternally is. . . . You need not seek Him here and there. He stands at the door of your heart and waits . . . opening and entering is one (*Auftun und Hineingehen ist Eins*). God as the Master of Nature allows under no circumstances that something remain empty. So stand still and waver not: You can in one moment turn from God and never return.⁴⁴

All this teaching and more is based on Eckhart's primary conception of the possibility of the birth of God in the individual soul, "God is born with Light in the ground of the soul and the

⁴³ "Ganc abs din selbes und aller dinge und alles, daz du an dir selber bist, und nim dich na dem, als du in gote bist."—Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

⁴⁴ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 167, 168.

overflow of this Light streams over into the body so that it becomes full of clarity."⁴⁴ Here we have a brief exposition of the ecstasy and illumination mentioned by many writers as characteristic of the holy life. It need not be amplified how Light is a recurring idea and experience with those Christians who concentrate the self on knowing and being known of God, or on knowing the glorified Jesus Christ. Eckhart explains further,

the countenance is as it were turned toward birth: in all that you see and hear whatever it is, in all things you can not do otherwise but receive this birth—yes all things become to you pure God for in all things you have only and purely God in mind (*im Sinne*). Exactly like some one looking long at the sun: Whatever he sees later, he sees also in the sun.⁴⁵

It must be this steady keeping of God in mind which causes him to speak of "knowing nothing of contraries" after the birth of God in the soul has taken place. He teaches,

When this birth hath taken place, then all creatures can not hinder you; quite the contrary: they all direct you to God.⁴⁶ One cannot learn through fleeing things and turning from outer things into lonesomeness, but he must learn an inner lonesomeness (*Einsamkeit*) wherever or with whomsoever he is. He must learn to break through things and in them grasp God and must be able to have Him formed within himself in a powerful (*kraftvoll*) and real way (*wesenhafter Weise*).⁴⁷

Here I want to emphasize again that the poverty and humility of this medieval monk were not that of an ascetic or of a man who thought himself weak and incapable of great things. We have the portrait of a man caught in the world of things who comes to the conclusion that

It is you yourself who hinder self in things. Your attitude to things is wrong, i.e., *verkehrt*—turned about. . . . It is more difficult to be alone in the crowd than in isolation. . . . A person must accustom all his powers and *direct* them to the consciousness of the inner self.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 167, 168.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 52, 75, 83.

Herein I think lies the secret of that which may be called mystic experience, an integration of the whole self so directed to God, the All, and so participating in the life of God by His grace and working that in having nothing and desiring nothing as Eckhart urged, man possesses all things. Thus we find Eckhart and other Friends of God and men to this very day "enduring hell" because they "possess heaven." They show what seems to be an ability to live collected and fortified in the midst of distraction and conflicts of the world. They are of ascetic temperament rather than ascetics. They have vision and assurance, which no authority can take from them. As Eckhart expresses it in the same sermon as the one from which the last quotation was made, "Since in this life a person cannot be without works, the person learns to possess his God in all things and to remain unhindered in all works and conditions." The idea that these "works" and conditions may be a way to God runs through Eckhart's sermons.)

Eckhart took academic thoughts and explained them in the vernacular. He taught with the authority of personal conviction and experience, and herein lay the secret of the carrying power of the ideas. Eckhart explained to his hearers the experience back of the ideas. "I have often said; great masters say it also . . . but now we say it differently" is an illuminating recurring phrase. (Eckhart quoted St. Augustine most often of all the masters. In one sermon at least he says, "St. Augustine says . . . but I say . . ." It was the personality of Eckhart which made him a mountain peak in German tradition.)

In his own day Eckhart had difficulties. He was misquoted and misinterpreted so that as related earlier in the chapter, some excerpts from his sermons remain under papal condemnation. He used frequently a yes-and-no method in exposition. Every teacher can understand how some of his hearers without meaning ill might repeat the "yes" without any recollection of the "no" part of the teaching.

The modern reader who thinks that a person who is speculative and mystical cannot be practical may be astonished to learn that Eckhart completely reverses the common interpretation of the contemplative Mary and the active Martha in the Gospel story.

Mary seems the beginner compared to the practiced Martha "who with all God's friends stands with care and not in care (*stant mit der sorge, niht in der sorge*)."⁴⁹

Early in his career Eckhart taught the young monks in Erfurt:

As I have often said, if some one were in ecstasy like St. Paul's and knew of an ill person who needed from him a small broth, I consider it far wiser that you willingly leave your ecstasy and serve in greater love the needy one.⁵⁰

Eckhart was not a hermit; to him,

He is a good person who shares himself usefully. As a heathen master said rightly, a hermit is in this sense neither good nor bad; he serves mankind in no way . . . the small act for another is more acceptable to God than all the ascetic practices of men.⁵¹

When Eckhart was asked if a person in whom the birth of God had taken place should do penance, he answered that the ascetic practices had grown up out of necessity and "are in order so long as the flesh of a man opposes his spirit . . . but a thousand times better it is to bind the spirit with love."

The teaching of Eckhart concerning this way of life, as in that of great mystics generally, moves in a circle swinging from the *vita contemplativa* as an achieved habit in life to the *vita activa* as the natural expression or fruitage of the former. Eckhart quotes the "holy" St. Thomas as saying, "Herein is the active life better than the contemplative where man breathes out into action what he has breathed in in contemplation." Eckhart teaches, "Here in the working is the aim of contemplation (*Schauen*) realized." He says,

If I went in this house from one end to the other, that would indeed be movement, but it would be one in one. So in activity one has nothing different from a seeing into God. One rests in the other and perfects the other.⁵²

One of the best illustrations of the *Drang* (urge) of Meister Eckhart is shown in a sermon on "*Gotttheit und Gott*." He asks his hearers to pay attention and adds,

⁴⁹ Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁵⁰ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 169, 170, 222.

⁵² Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

— He who understands this sermon, I grant it to him happily (*dem gönne ich's wohl*). But if no one had been here, I should have had to preach it to this very sacrifice-stick (*Opferstock*, probably "a poor-box" close at hand).⁵³

Surely this reveals a person not driven hither and yon by every wind that blows through the minds of men.

One of the most interesting legends about Eckhart is a poem⁵⁴ written by a nun doubtless living in his day. The poem tells of other masters. Particularly interesting is the nun's characterization of "the great Meister Diderich who would make us joyful by his preaching about *in principio*." We learn that "the wise Meister Hechard tells of nothing and of destroying one's created self to be drawn into the uncreated and to see into clear Being (*Wesenklar*)."⁵⁵ After each stanza there is a refrain as if the poem were used in an educational or perhaps even a recreational way in the convents. The young nuns often sang their lessons.

Pfeiffer, Delacroix, and other scholars in this field are wont to quote "a fragment" concerning Eckhart,

A person complained to Meister Eckhart that no one could understand his preaching; then he spoke: he who would understand my preaching, shall have five things (*fünf stücke*). He shall have conquered in all temptations and shall cling to his highest good; it shall be enough for him that God disciplines him; he shall be a beginner among beginners; he shall destroy self and shall exercise self control that he may show no anger. (Cod. monac. Germ. 365 fol. 192.)

Of the many legends found in the Eckhartian tradition I have always liked best "The Naked Boy":⁵⁵

"Where do you come from?" asked Meister Eckhart of a lovely boy whom he met.

"From God," the lad answered.

"Where did you leave Him?"

"In virtuous hearts."

⁵³ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 240-242.

⁵⁴ Jundt, *Essai sur le mysticisme spéculatif de maître Eckhart*, p. 150. See modern German version in Hans Much, *Meister Eckkehart; ein Roman der deutschen Seele*, p. 434.

⁵⁵ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, p. 310.

"Where are you going?"

"To God."

"Where will you find Him?"

"In learning everything that is created."

"Who are you?"

"A King."

"Where is your kingdom?"

"In my heart."

"Have a care lest some one possess it with you."

"That I do."

Then Eckhart led him into his cell and said, "Take whichever coat you wish."

"Then I would not be King," the lad said and vanished.

So it was God Himself who had been with him for a while.

The *Schwester Katrei*⁵⁶ story often published as one of Eckhart's writings was probably anonymous writing of the day, illustrative of the growing consciousness of the layman to do some of his own religious thinking. Often the name of a great teacher was attached to such a writing in order to gain a hearing and command respect. Sister Katharine was a laywoman who followed the instruction of her father confessor, Eckhart, so well that she surpassed him in understanding truth, and so taught the Master. It is an interesting document for the study of popular religious ideas of the times. The importance of it for this study of the Friends of God is the emphasis laid on the layman's spiritual insight in contrast with that of the clergy. In the later chapters dealing with "the great unknown Friend of God of the Oberland" and with the content of other anonymous writings, it may become apparent that stories like "Schwester Katrei" were very likely conscious or unconscious attempts to establish the dignity of individual religious thinking and experience.

Perhaps enough has been said to characterize the vital impression made by Eckhart. The selecting of sayings to illustrate his teachings was difficult. Over and over again a quotation was discarded for one which seemed more revealing of the personality expressing the thought. It is obviously impossible to give a com-

⁵⁶ Simon, Otto, *Überlieferung und Handschriftenverhältnis des Traktates "Schwester Katrei."*

plete picture of so great a man in one chapter. One is constantly reminded of an eagle soaring toward the sun and then straightway compelled to remember the man's humanness and humility. When Professor Otto calls Meister Eckhart "*der klimmende geist*," he is using Meister Eckhart's own phrase,

He who would be perfected in this kind of love must have four things. The first, true withdrawal from all creatures . . . the second, like Leah, an active life . . . the third, like Rachel, a contemplative life . . . and fourth, a climbing spirit (*ein klimmender geist*).⁵⁷

The relation of the climbing spirit which is at the same time the poor spirit may be illustrated by Eckhart's own exposition of the relation,

To be simple and poor, to have nothing, to be empty changes nature; to be empty makes water climb the mountain and brings to pass yet many wonders of which one can not speak now.

It seems to me that this combination of poverty of spirit and boldest aspiration is grounded in a concept which appears often in medieval religious thinking, namely that God is not a destroyer but one who fulfills nature.⁵⁸

To some modern German scholars there is a significant parallel between the early German mystics and German art; for instance, Professor Otto describes Meister Eckhart as "early Gothic" and Tauler and Suso as "later Gothic." In the early Gothic appeared that which was distinctly individual, breaking traditional forms of art. With Eckhart, the teacher, there was the old scholastic training and foundation and there was the individual stretching toward light; an erectness of spirit and a *flug-kraft*, or flying strength, of thought.)

On this point a modern German study⁵⁹ of this decade, called *The Gothic in German Art and Spiritual Life*, is clarifying. Her-

⁵⁷ Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

⁵⁸ "*Wan got ist niht ein zerstoerer der nature, mër: er vollebringet si, unde daz tuot got ie me und ie me, ie dar nach daz du dich me dar zu fuegest.*"—Lehmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 110; 89; Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 18. Also Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 573.

⁵⁹ Schmitz, H., *Die Gotik im deutschen Kunst und Geistesleben*.

man Schmitz refers to the period in which Eckhart lived as "the summer of the German Gothic." In the German Gothic of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries he finds revealed a spirit distinctively German. He points out that Gothic art in the German provinces developed some decades after its rise in France. When at the end of the thirteenth century, the cathedrals of Strassburg and Cologne were being builded, there was a simplification and a *burgher* element in the modification of the French Gothic. The new elements showed something belonging peculiarly to the people of the Rhine valley. In the pointed arches and more open spaces of the new cathedrals there was "a solemn upward streaming mood . . . the feeling of reverent devotion and of joyful spirit." Schmitz speaks of "*der hochgehende Bewegungsdrang*" which recalls Eckhart's "climbing spirit."

That there is something uniquely German in Eckhart seems to be accepted by German writers, and French and English critics as well. Resemblances between the ideas of Eckhart and Fichte, between Eckhart and Kant, kinship between Eckhart and Spinoza, and between him and the beloved modern poet, Rilke, are constantly traced. In 1830 Baader reports that when he and Hegel were together in Berlin, he read some parts of Eckhart's writings to Hegel; the next day, Hegel gave a whole lecture period to presenting Meister Eckhart and closed the period by exclaiming, "Here we have indeed what we want."⁶⁰

Whether Eckhart was or was not a Friend of God is a question not necessarily settled by the present writer, who believes that if anyone had asked the Master directly, "Are you God's friend?" he would have replied "Yes." The humility of the man would prevent his speaking much of himself as God's friend. There is no question about his having experienced and lived the truth which he so zealously taught. He is the beloved mountain peak dominating for the early German Dominican monks and nuns the horizon of their thought. He was Dominican and it was Dominican monks and nuns who in the quarter of a century

⁶⁰ R. Otto and other modern writers on Eckhart; also Karl Pearson, *Mind*, 1886; Baader, Franz, *Werke*, XV, 159; in chap. x of this study, the unique "Germanness" of the Friends of God is again considered.

after his death defined clearly and made practicable the idea of God's friend (*Gottesfreund*). It is they and their followers who are known historically as Friends of God. It will be remembered that they formed a fellowship and not an organization, so there is no overt criterion of membership that can be applied in every case.

For the purpose of later comparison let me indicate briefly Eckhart's characteristic use of the term *Gottesfreunde*, or Friends of God:

He loved us before we were, and also when we were hostile to him. So necessary is our friendship to God that He approaches us and asks us to be his friends.⁶¹

It is not necessary that one tell specially the Lover about the Beloved . . . in that one feels himself to be *Gottesfreund*, he is straightway sure (*sicher*) of all that which is good for him and his happiness (*Seligkeit*). For no matter how much you love Him, you are surer of this that He loves you immeasurably more, and that He is incomparably more faithful, for He is Faithfulness itself (*denn er ist die Treue selbst*).⁶²

You must know that God's friends are never without consolation; for what God wills, that is their highest solace whether it be consoling or otherwise.⁶³

From the *Book of Divine Consolations* written late in life and sent to the Queen of Hungary, Eckhart argues concerning the suffering of God's friends,

Yes, how can it be that the good loving God endures that his friends, the good persons, are not continually suffering? If one had a friend who for a great purpose, to achieve honor and advantage and continually to win, would endure for several days suffering and he or another wilfully tried to hinder this suffering,

⁶¹ Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 62. In translating *Gottesfreunde* as "God's friends" or "Friends of God," there seems to be a difference in the English meaning. Even if there is also in the German, the term in either form implies a mutual relationship between God and man. God chooses and man not only desires but wills to be chosen of God in friendship.

⁶² Lehmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

one could not say that he was his friend and loved him. Therefore perhaps God too in no way can endure that his friends, the good ones, be without suffering even if they suffer unwillingly.⁶⁴

It is this Eckhart, "the speculative mystic" who is the spiritual ancestor of Tauler, Suso, and other Friends of God of the next generation. They preach and try to live the way of salvation which he taught. In Suso's *Book of Truth* edited by himself, he explained to "a nameless wild one" the teachings of Eckhart. The wild one had misunderstood Eckhart's conceptions of union with God, and of freedom. It is Eckhart, the German theologian of "the early Gothic type," rather than the scholastic, who is significant in the history of German religious thought. It is Eckhart, the master and mystic, who taught the need and worth of the inner (*ganz und gar innen*) experiences of the individual soul which expresses a German ideal prevalent to this modern era. When a German speaks of *Innerlichkeit* (inwardness) this inwardness implies both the upward aspiration and a fullness or passion for life. Professor Rudolf Otto says accurately that a soul-stirring, aspiring paragraph from Eckhart is "like a Bach Amen."⁶⁵

Eckhart sought God and found Him not in the heavens, not in abstract ideas, but within "the ground" of his own soul and in the soul of every individual. He taught both the literate and the illiterate of his day to persist in knowing themselves until *within*, they were found of God and like God Himself, became saviors of men. "God would rather make a friend out of an enemy than create a new world."

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

⁶⁵ Otto, R., *op. cit.*, p. 253.

CHAPTER IV

TAULER AND SUSO: MORALIST AND AGONIST AMONG THE FRIENDS OF GOD

The Dominican friar, Johannes Tauler, preacher in Strassburg, Cologne, and Basel was wont in his sermons to tell the young monks or nuns "of lofty great minds like high mountains." According to tradition and the number of his sermons carefully kept, his students heard him eagerly, and doubtless turned to him for light and guidance on the way of life. The humility of the man who urged them to take "all my words, not my works as from God; for I have studied them all in the book of my transgressions," and his unfailing understanding of all persons, even the worst sinners, left a deep impression on his hearers. His analysis of human ways and affections was so keen, and his language so vigorous and fitted to the thought of growth in the inner life that each listener must have seen himself as in a mirror.

Tauler was a man in his forties when he told the young nuns that they were living in more difficult times than their elders, that "the inclinations of young people are stronger than ever; now everything sinks down to the level of animal pleasures and the desires of the senses . . . therefore more help is needed now than ever."¹ When he described the chatterers, the grumblers, the self-excusers who flew "like angry dogs" at their critics, the persons "of a hundred minds" who knew not what to do, those

¹ Lehmann, W., *Johannes Tauler Predigten*. 2 Bd. Also Vetter, Ferdinand, *Die Predigten Taulers aus der Engelberger und der Freiburger Hss. sowie aus Schmidt's Abschriften der ehemaligen Strassburger Hs.* Eighty-one sermons and fragments in the original German. If Vetter had been available at the beginning of my work, all references would have been to Vetter. Some of the translations are from Hutton, A. W., *The Inner Way*: Being thirty-six sermons for festivals by John Tauler. See footnote 29 of this chapter for secondary sources.

who wishing to go to Rome started out toward Holland, those who were too busy—oh, very busy—with sacred pictures and personal devotions, they must have laughed at themselves and secretly resolved to do better. More than once he asked monks and nuns,

Do you think that God created you only to be his song birds? ✓
God wished to have you as his special brides and friends.²

Rest and trust and keep to thyself; do not run about too much, be not agitated, preoccupied or impulsive, but realize the Presence of the Lord of Lords in thy heart.³

Children, man has many a skin in himself covering the depths of his heart. Man knows so many other things; he does not know himself. Why, thirty or forty skins or hides just like an oxen's or a bear's so thick and hard cover his soul. Go into your own ground and learn to know yourself there.⁴

Tauler urged his listeners to try to understand what he had to say to them, although he knew that some people did not believe in his teaching and called him "Beghard! Heretic!" and wished "to cut off his head." His sharp references to conduct, "wilder than bears and lions and a disgrace in the sight of God our Creator," were always followed by positive urging to know oneself. In this connection he explained also that some folk had a besetting sin of studying themselves and making long stories, thinking themselves "special friends of God," when they were not! "Some folk can talk so reasonably and so humbly of their Nothing, just as if they really had come into possession of this noble virtue—and they yet are taller than this cathedral. . . . Some talk as if they were the Apostles themselves."⁵ He did not recommend such superficial knowledge of self but rather a communion with oneself, for "the Kingdom of God is within you." He taught:

Dear children, though God is no respecter of persons and loves all things that He hath made, still He has his friends—those who ✓
are most conscious of his favor and turn to Him with all their

² Lehmann, *op. cit.*, II, 161; I, 61.

³ Hutton, A. W., *The Inner Way*, p. 213.

⁴ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, II, 79; I, 206; I, 78.

⁵ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, I, 207. Strassburg Cathedral was completed in Tauler's time. Also Lehmann, *op. cit.*, I, 209.

might—who are especially dear to Him and it is not his fault that all men do not turn to Him. . . . There is nothing so broad or so universal as God, nor so near to the inmost heart of man: he who will seek Him there shall find Him. . . . Every day we find Him in the Blessed Sacrament, in all the friends of God, and in all creatures.⁶

Tauler defines the idea of *Gottesfreunde* by admitting that the majority of folk are, "Alas! God's enemies."⁷ Then too some are friends of the world not easily distinguished from the friends of God. One distinction is that the worldly persons are "full of opinions and judgments about other people and yet do not judge themselves. They are exceedingly selfish, even with God."⁸ But those who would be otherwise must,

Know that if you seek something that is your own, you seek not God. You will never find Him. You are acting as though you made a candle of God to seek for something, and when you have found it, you throw the candle away.⁹

Tauler knows that selfishness is

so deeply fastened in human nature that it would be easier to break through an iron mountain than to conquer this with nature. . . . There is only one way to conquer, that is, as God takes over the places in our hearts into his possession.

In defining the idea of God's friends, Tauler states that "there must be a separation, a difference . . . and this does not mean a sect if God's friends hold themselves unlike the friends of the world."¹⁰ Doubtless the number of heretical sects of the day caused the good monk, vowed particularly to preach the faith of the Church, to make this distinction of "difference" and "separation" yet not "a sect." That the Friends of God recognized each other and associated is clear from records and references to

⁶ Hutton, *op. cit.*, p. 25. Lehmann, *op. cit.*, II, 41.

⁷ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, I, 192. Vetter, *op. cit.*, pp. 411, 119, 127, 200, 354, etc.

⁸ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, II, 222 ff. See also Sermon—*Von der Rückkehr in den göttlichen Ursprung und dem, was uns daranhindert* in Lehmann, *op. cit.*, I, 45. Vetter, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁹ Hutton, *op. cit.*, p. 46. This figure of using God as a candle, Eckhart used. Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

¹⁰ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, II, 222.

groups in various cities like Basel and Strassburg, and within the monasteries. The English word "fellowship" helps to describe their associations or groups.

Reference was made above to the humorous strain which appears in Tauler's sermons. But no person of serious devotion to social work in our own day will consider as humorous, the experience of Tauler and his associates as described in the following:

In days gone by God's friends were martyred and tormented by the heathen; but now it is done by the people who appear to be good Christians; they cut us to the heart, and yet they are our neighbors. Know, children, what the true, enlightened, illumined friends of God are like,—their hearts melt with love for all persons living and dead. And if it were not for these people, we would be badly off. . . . Even God rests in them.¹¹

In a sermon¹² which was probably preached on All Saints Day, "the procession of saints" who followed Jesus is appealingly presented in that each saint followed his own vocation as God called him. Tauler, instead of saying you should, or one should, says, "We must follow after them endeavoring above all things to discover the vocation to which God has called us and follow it." In the procession are: 1) "the holy patriarchs of the Old Covenant," who believed that Jesus would come; 2) the dear and holy Apostles who forsook all things in true poverty of body and soul; 3) the holy martyrs—a great company; 4) the holy confessors, also a great company who followed in divers ways; some as hermits and others in religious orders; 5) the blessed company of pure and modest virgins undefiled in body and soul; 6) then comes "the company of the common people who are also upheld by the faith and prayer of God's friends."

As to "the marks of a friend of God," the first is doubtless the offering of self out of pure love as a living sacrifice unto God. "This takes place in such marvelous love, that it cannot well be expressed in words."

For the soul overflows with the freedom of the spirit with which it is endowed and goes to the Heavenly Father, and unites itself

¹¹ Hutton, *op. cit.*, p. 220. Lehmann, *op. cit.*, I, 203, 179, 184.

¹² "*Videns Jesus turbas. . .*"—Hutton, *op. cit.*, Ser. XXV, 215 ff.

with Him as far as it can by the absolute annihilation of self, to His high and blessed praise. It yields wholly to Him, in a fathomless Nothingness, in the Abyss of His Godhead, and beseeches Him to make it fruitful in His service, and as He has loved and chosen it from all eternity, that He will bring to pass in it, and in all creatures that for which He has created them, . . . whatever it may be.¹³

Persistence is likewise a distinguishing trait. Tauler describes persons who wish to accomplish wonders in four or five years and "ask that we pray that they may become one of God's best beloved friends. In this way you could not become one of the least of God's friends."¹⁴

The mark of human insight and understanding has been referred to. This includes particularly forgiving one's enemies. A friend of God is not full of judgments concerning others. Tauler says, "I would prefer to bite my own tongue than to judge a person." In another sermon he advises his hearers "to leave your neighbor to God and judge yourself."¹⁵

It is said that mercy is the attribute that God shows forth in all his works; therefore a merciful person is a truly God-like man. For mercy is brought forth by love and kindness. Therefore the true friends of God are much more merciful and more ready to believe in the sinful and suffering than those who are not loving. Mercy is born of that love which we ought to exercise towards each other.¹⁶

The friends of God are known also by the peace which is theirs—peace with God, and with themselves for their minds are fixed on God. However, there is a kind of restlessness in true friends of God which is "a letting-out of the net" in that they have not as much of God as they wish. This reminds one of the restlessness of which Augustine wrote.¹⁷

¹³ Hutton, *op. cit.*, pp. 249-250.

¹⁴ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, I, 44.

¹⁵ Oehl, W., *Tauler*. 19 sermons in "Deutsche Mystiker" series, Vol. IV, p. 28. See also Lehmann, *op. cit.*, I, 119.

¹⁶ Hutton, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

¹⁷ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, I, 183. Tauler quotes or mentions Augustine 37 times, Bernard of Clairvaux 22 times, Gregory the Great 20 times, pseudo-

Suffering is probably the most distinguishing mark of God's friends. According to Tauler,

A soul full of God and a natural body full of suffering is the inheritance of the friends of God. . . . Our Lord will not leave any of his friends without suffering. . . . He would create suffering out of nothing, the faithful and true God, who has chosen that his friends should suffer when He sees that they are not living as befits them.¹⁸

Tauler told a story of St. Dominic, who asked one of his companions who was weeping bitterly, why he wept. When he replied, "Dear father, because of my sins," the Saint said, "No, dear son, they have been sufficiently mourned for; but I beseech thee, dear son, to weep for those who will not weep for themselves." Then Tauler added,

Thus *the true friends of God* weep for all the blindness and misery of the sins of the world, and for all its wickedness. For when God allows his anger and his judgment to fall upon us, and we say so many dreadful things about the fire, the floods, the great darkness, strong winds and bad times, then the saints mourn over all before the Lord, day and night; and He regardeth them and ceaseth, waiting to see if we will do better. If we do not improve we must expect yet heavier and severer plagues. The clouds hang over us; but they are held up by the weeping of God's friends. But be sure of this, if we do not improve, they will soon fall; and then there will be such tumults and turmoils that we shall be put in mind of the Judgment Day.¹⁹

Tauler's attitude toward life rather than his practices was ascetic. "Outer practices are but a way and a preparation," or as in another sermon,

God has given all things that they may be the way to Him; He will be the only Goal. . . . Do ye imagine that I say this in derision?

Dionysius 15 times; also Albertus Magnus, Anselm, Boethius, Dominic, Aquinas, Origen, Aristotle, Hugo and Richard of St. Victor, etc. See also Vogt-Terhorst, *Der bildliche Ausdruck in der Predigten Johann Taulers*.

¹⁸ Hutton, *op. cit.*, p. 226. Lehmann, *op. cit.*, I, 48, 54.

¹⁹ Hutton, *op. cit.*, pp. 221, 222. Vetter—"Jesus videns turbas. . . ."

No indeed! Your Order can neither make you holy nor blessed. My cowl, my tonsure, my cloister, my holy community—none of these can make me holy.²⁰

He urged moderation in outward exercise, and was very impatient with those who ran constantly to their teachers, to confessors, and to God's friends. "The noblest friend of God" whom he knew was a husbandman (*ackersman*) for more than forty years. Once the husbandman asked our Lord if he should give up his work and go into the Church. God answered no—he should not do that but should earn his bread in the sweat of his body to the honor of His sacrifice.²¹

Tauler's understanding of the needs of the common people is shown when in discussing poverty he refers first to "those who are poor against their own will and wish. No one ought to judge harshly of these poor; for the Lord overlooks their faults all the more graciously on account of their poverty."²²

Outward monastic poverty Tauler considered to be a special ✓ God-given vocation, too difficult for most persons.

No man can attain to this in his own strength. Inner poverty is a much higher state than outward, because it is in the likeness of God, while the latter resembled only his humanity. He who possessed both *is* the most exalted. But there are not many such men to be found.²³

Tauler was very popular with Dominican monks and nuns. Over to the east near Nüremberg, the nun, Christine Ebner had a vision in 1351 in which God told her that Tauler was "the most beloved person he had on earth"; and in another vision, that some men had inflamed the earth with their fiery tongues; among them, the names of Tauler and Heinrich von Nördlingen were written in heaven. In a later vision, Christine was told by God that he dwelt in Tauler "as in sweet harp music." Heinrich von Nördlingen

²⁰ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, I, 59. Hutton, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

²¹ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, I, 186. Oehl, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

²² Hutton, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

²³ Beati pauperes spiritu. . . .—Sermon XXVI, Hutton, *op. cit.*, pp. 227 ff.

was a supervising priest and preacher, who doubtless as he visited convents spoke often of Tauler. He had written in a letter (1348) to the convent of Maria Medingen, "Pray for our dear father Tauler. He is as a rule in great suffering because he teaches the truth and lives the truth completely."²⁴

Of Tauler we have no biography. Occasionally in his sermons he gives personal illustrations. We know that he was a burgher's son. In one sermon, he said "If I had known what I know now when I was still my father's son, I would have lived on his inheritance and not on alms,"²⁵ a statement which suggests many thoughts about the mendicant's vow of poverty. It is probable that it is his father's name which appears in the town records as one of the Strassburg councilors. Tauler's sister was a nun in the Convent of St. Nikolaus *in undis* in Strassburg. In the garden of that convent Tauler died in 1361; so to the last he kept in touch with his own family. Of his writings we are certain of one short letter written by Tauler in 1346 to the prioress of the Convent of Maria Medingen and to the nun, Margaret Ebner, who doubtless kept it carefully for it appears in the collection of her letters.²⁶ Tauler's sermons were carefully kept by his listeners; many old manuscripts are available. But the research as to Tauler's authentic sermons is not yet completed. For centuries (up to the late nineteenth) Tauler's sermons were printed in the various languages with an account of a great crisis in his life. This was his reputed conversion from a mediocre preacher to a veritable man of God. The conversion was supposed to have been brought about by a *layman*, unknown except that he was called "the great friend of God of the Oberland." The crisis was described in great detail with illustrations of his sermons before and after the layman became his spiritual adviser. Tauler was not mentioned by name,

²⁴ Christine Ebner's visions in Georg Lochner, *Leben und Gesichte der Christine Ebnerin*. Tauler letter in Heumann: *Opuscula quibus varia iuris Germanici*. . . p. 343.

²⁵ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, II, 65.

²⁶ Strauch, P., *Margaret Ebner und Heinrich von Nördlingen*. Letter LVII, date of letter is Feb. 28, 1346 addressed to the prioress and Margaret Ebner. Tauler thanks them briefly for New Year's wishes, sends some cheeses and signs himself "your poor friend and servant in Christ."

but the fact that the book called *Das Meister Buch*²⁷ appeared first in Strassburg after Tauler's death, and that he had been the best known German preacher probably accounts for its being attached to his name. The scholarly critic Denifle (+1905) who had worked on the Eckhart traditions and manuscripts and had edited Suso's writings also cleared away the undergrowth of tradition about Tauler's conversion.²⁸

The writings *Institutiones* and *Medulla animae* translated into French and other languages as belonging to Tauler are no longer associated with him except indirectly. They belong to the same time and may contain genuine fragments. The *Imitation of the Poverty of Jesus Christ*, or *The Book of Spiritual Poverty*, has likewise been declared from internal evidence as probably not Tauler's. In 1543, Peter Canisius published thirty letters supposed to have been written by Tauler. These were translated into Latin by Surius and published in Köln, 1548. Surius marked three as evidently not Tauler's. Since then all but one are questioned. The earliest printed editions of Tauler's sermons carry the dates 1498, 1521, and 1543.²⁹

In reading Tauler's sermons, Wilhelm Oehl, translator and editor of German mystical writings, is reminded "of trombones and thunderings." The writings of Heinrich Suso suggest to him "flutes and bird songs."³⁰ Tauler (1300-1361) and Suso (c. 1295-

²⁷ *The Book of the Master* will be considered again in chap. vi of this study. The *Institutiones*, *The Book of Spiritual Poverty*, and the pseudo-Tauler letters will be reviewed below, chap. vii.

²⁸ Denifle, *Taulers Bekehrung kritisch Untersucht*. Also his writings on *Der Gottesfreund in Oberland*. See especially Denifle, *Die Dichtungen des Gottesfreundes im Oberlande*, *Zeitschrift für deutsches Alterthum* (1880).

²⁹ Buchon, J. A. C., *Choix d'ouvrages mystiques institutions de Frère J. Tauler*, pp. 609-717. This should be read by every student of Tauler. *Medulla animae* pub. 1643 from an older MS. The editor headed chap. xxv "All the teaching of Tauler in three points. *Nachfolgung des armen Lebens Christi, zum erstenmal im Jahre 1621 aus einem alten von anno 1448 geschriebenen Exemplar von Wort zu Wort freulich und ganz unverfälscht nachgedruckt*. (Frankfurt am Mayn und Leipzig, 1720.) Some of pseudo-Tauler letters trans. into modern German are in Wilhelm Oehl's *Deutsche Mystikerbriefe des Mittelalters*.

³⁰ Oehl, *op. cit.*, Introduction.

1366) were practically contemporaries. Suso being about five years older would have been one student generation ahead of Tauler in the Dominican schools. Tauler when a lad in his home place, Strassburg, probably heard Eckhart preach. It is very likely that when Tauler became a priest about 1325 he was sent to the Dominican College in Cologne, which ranked as the second school in the Order. From the absence of his name on records, we are certain that he was not sent to Paris for graduate study. He is not "Master" or "Doctor," but "Brother" Tauler. It will be remembered that in 1325-1327, Meister Eckhart in Cologne was defending himself against heretical charges and declaring himself a faithful son of the Church. Tauler in his sermons does not mention Eckhart by name. His teachings, however, reveal a clear impress on Tauler of Eckhart's speculative mysticism. No doubt Eckhart was to him one of "the lofty great minds like high mountains." It is certain that Suso knew Meister Eckhart. He tells that after years of considering himself a damned soul he came to the holy Meister Eckhart and told him all. He freed him from the hell in which he had been.³¹ The names of Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso are commonly linked. Thus Martin Grabmann in 1926 described them as follows:

The three great Friends of God are the mystical constellation (*Gestirn*) of the Dominican Order—Meister Eckhart, whose greatness lay in speculative mysticism, Johannes Tauler, the powerful preacher of life-and-heart knowledge, and Heinrich Suso, the *minnesinger* among the mystics.³²

Similar modern references to the three as "a constellation" in German mysticism are common.

One thing is certain—that each of these preaching friars in his own way sought to open his whole self to God. That was "eternal life" to them. Each was convinced of the possible birth

³¹ Denifle. *Die deutschen Schriften des seligen Heinrich Seuse*, p. 91. Denifle's Introduction discusses the original manuscripts and the disagreement of scholars concerning Suso's life. Very detailed notes accompanying the text give references to Eckhart, Tauler, Aquinas, and others. See also Knox, T. G., *The Life of Blessed Henry Suso by Himself*.

³² Grabmann, M., *Mittelalterliches Geistesleben*, p. 478.

of God in the soul of man, and taught zealously that the ways to God varied and were open to all the children of men because God needed man and had created him in a special likeness. In naming Tauler, "preacher," and Suso "poet" (in temperament rather than in form of writing), tradition indicates that these two stood more in the active life in contrast with Eckhart. It may be that the times which grew more troubled toward the middle of the century caused the change in emphasis. While it is a disputed question as to whether Eckhart stood more in the *vita contemplativa* or in the *vita activa*, he is known historically as a speculative and the other two are known as practical mystics. The teachings of all three contain the idea of alternation between the "contemplative self" and "the fruits of contemplation." In this chapter the preacher and poet are with some difficulty (because of the wealth of material) presented together in order to contrast their personalities and at the same time their similarity in thought, though their temperaments and the outward circumstances of their lives differ exceedingly.

Concerning Suso's family we know from his autobiography that he took his mother's family name, Seuse, or Suss (*alemanische*); in modern German the name is Seuse; Suso was the Latin form used by Surius. His mother was

full of the Almighty God and her whole desire was to live a spiritual life. All the days of her life she was a very great sufferer—her husband was full of the world and opposed her with great harshness and severity. It was her custom to cast all her sorrows into the bitter sufferings of Jesus Christ and in this way to get mastery over them.

She died while Suso was studying in Cologne. At the time she appeared in a vision and said to him with great joy:

Ah my child, love God and trust Him well, for He will never forsake thee in any trouble. See I have departed from this world and yet I am not dead . . . I shall live everlastingly in the presence of the everlasting God.³³

³³ Denifle, *op. cit.*, p. 208. Knox, *op. cit.*, p. 187. This autobiography was first written by Elizabeth Stagel (1300-1360) known best as "Suso's

Suso's sister was not a refuge to him as Tauler's sister was, but quite the reverse—she needed to be rescued. She had been "under obedience of the religious life." Whether this means as a nun or a tertiary is not clear. "She had attached herself to evil company, fell into sin, ran away in her grief." Suso hearing of it "became like a stone from sorrow and went about like one out of his mind." When he decided to find her, his fellow friars disapproved. "It was the rainy season," we are told in the autobiography. At last after great effort he found her. She, seeing his sorrow, fell at his feet crying,

Alas my lord and father, what a sad day was that which brought me into the world, since I have lost God and caused you much suffering. Alas, true brother and rescuer of my lost soul, that I am not worthy that you should speak to me, still take me to your pure heart and call to mind that in nothing can you be more true to God and act more like Him than in what you do for a castaway sinner and over-burdened heart. Since God has made you full of pity for all pitiable things, how will you refuse to pity me, a poor castaway sinner?

And Suso comforted her and answered,

I will gladly forgive thee altogether the exceeding pain and sorrow which I have suffered through thee and must go on suffering to my life's end . . . I will help thee with all my might to expiate and correct thy sin in the sight of God and of the world.

He found a refuge for her, probably in a Beguine house.³⁴

From his eighteenth to his fortieth year (1335) Suso had the habit of excessive ascetic practices. Early he cut over his heart the name of Jesus, in the letters IHS. He tells us that "the letters were about the length of a joint of the little finger." In times of trouble he would look or gaze at this love-token on his body, and say within himself words like these, "See, Lord, earthly lovers write their beloved's name upon their garments; but I have written

spiritual daughter." She was a Dominican nun in the convent of Töss. Suso destroyed the first draft of the story of his life but when she persisted, he edited the material; see footnote 43 of this chapter.

³⁴ Denifle, *op. cit.*, p. 101. Knox, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

Thee upon the fresh blood of my heart.”³⁵ He slept in hair shirts on rough boards with a sharp cross on his back. Dean Inge speaks of Suso’s austerities as “shocking to our moral sense almost as much as to our sensibilities” and compares him unfavorably with such “sane and healthy people as Eckhart and Tauler.”³⁶ Suso himself tells us that God told him to give up outward ascetic practices and that they were “a prelude only for his entering into a higher school, the school of the Holy Spirit” where the sufferings were in the inner self.³⁷ From his fortieth year on, Suso forbade ascetic practices on the part “of his spiritual daughter” and others.

One may wonder why it took Suso forty years to learn this. But perhaps in a time when imitation of the sufferings of Jesus was frequently interpreted literally, there is no call to stumble over the element of ascetic agonizing in Suso’s life. It would seem more appropriate to lay some stress on the intensity of his sufferings and struggles so as to throw into clearer light the magnitude of his progress in that, torn as he was, he did succeed in emerging on a level of greater integration and firmness instead of “sticking” in his sufferings or of being destroyed by them. Suso in his own experience runs the gamut of suffering on various levels and mounts to the higher. It is for this reason that one may think of him especially as the agonist among God’s friends.

Suso was not as popular with his fellow Dominicans as Tauler. He was in constant trial of being misunderstood and opposed. Once he was accused by some village folk of carrying “poison bags given to him by the Jews.”³⁸ This was during the Black Death. He tells that frequently on journeys he was cold and hungry and no one would give him *herberge* even for God’s sake. Falling into the Rhine and ruining a precious book, annoying as it was, was nothing compared to the persecutions which he endured. Even Heinrich von Nördlingen wrote to his friend Margaret Ebner that he did not approve of Suso as he once did. It is interesting to note that this man who was scorned even by friends

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 26 ff.

³⁶ Inge, *Light, Life and Love*. Introduction, p. xlviii.

³⁷ Denifle, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

³⁸ Denifle, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

in his lifetime became known soon after his death as "Suso, Amandus [Beloved]." ³⁹

Suso's suffering evidently worried some of his friends. He records that once God gave a vision to "a chosen friend of God" by name Anna in which she saw the many children Suso brought to God and she learned that God would protect Suso in all suffering. In the vision Suso had on his head a green wreath with white and red roses; the white symbolized his purity, and the red, his patience in suffering. The wreath, which was like the small golden one usually painted about the head of the blessed, symbolized the manifold sufferings which the dear Friends of God must endure while they live serving God in knightly fashion (*mit ritterlicher Uebung*). ⁴⁰

Once when Suso returned from a very difficult journey, he relates that a layman visited him. This man was *ein seliger Gottesfreund*. He told Suso that he had complained to God, "Oh gentle God, how can you allow such bitter suffering to come upon your friend?" And God had answered, "For this, I have chosen him that he may in suffering be patterned after my own Son." Furthermore, God had told him that Suso's two worst tormentors on that trip would soon die. And we learn in the record that they did die soon and many persons knew about it. ⁴¹

In another story told by Suso there is evidence that the Friends of God cared for each other. He tells that once an old choirmaster when dying gave to him, then prior (probably in Constance), many gulden to distribute "here and there among poor Friends of God who had weakened themselves with severe practices." Suso did this, keeping careful accounts but the choirmaster's son became his enemy and tried to kill him. ⁴²

By this and similar experiences, Suso felt greatly humiliated. In his autobiography Suso told that his comrades were witness that he never retaliated but tried to do all he could for the good of others. "The faithful father of the poor," I was called. "I was the special friend of all the Friends of God; all sad and

³⁹ Suso was beatified, i.e., declared "Blessed" by Pope Gregory XVI in 1831. March 2 is his feast day.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁴⁰ Denifle, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 212 ff.

burdened persons came to me and always found some counsel. . . . Everything living on this earth found gentleness in me." He speaks of "the painful practices of all God's friends" and later in a prayer he who knew much of suffering offers to bear the sufferings of others in their stead.⁴³

Suso is remarkable, too, for his ardent imagination and poetic power. He tells us that "from youth up he had a loving heart." He loved festivals and ceremonies. He relates how when the foolish people of the world began to abandon themselves to merriment "he set about keeping in his heart 'a heavenly carnival' and explains 'the prelude to eternity,' namely, how God makes merry with His chosen friends while they are still clothed in this mortal body."⁴⁴ He kept symbolically the Feast of Candles, honoring the Virgin with three carefully prepared tapers, one, to symbolize "her stainless and virginal purity; another, her unfathomable humility, and the third, her maternal dignity." In one of his long songs of praise "of the pure Queen of Heaven," he calls Mary, "O thou chosen bosom friend of God."⁴⁵ "He ran to meet her with the multitude of all souls that love God and he outran them all with the longings of his heart."⁴⁶

It was a custom in Swabia, his native country, for young lovers to serenade the beloved on New Year's eve and ask for garlands. So on such a night Suso went "to his Eternal Love" with the petition,

Ah my beloved! Thou art indeed an Easter Day of joy to me. Thou art the bliss of summer to my heart, and the hour of my delight.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 120 ff. Lichtenberger in *Revue hebdomadaire des cours et conférences*, March, 1910, p. 600, questioned the originality of the prologue and autobiography in the *Exemplar* and proposed that by study of Suso's thoughts in the *Book of Eternal Wisdom* one could work back to the real in Suso's life. Oehl in *Deutsche Mystikerbriefe*, note p. 369, states that Vetter and Karl Rieder also question the authenticity of the prologue and the life. K. Bihlmeyer considers the "Life" genuine. See *Théol. revue*, 1913, 1928.

⁴⁴ Knox, *op. cit.*, chap. xiii.

⁴⁵ *Book of Eternal Wisdom*, chaps. xvi, xviii, Denifle, *op. cit.*, p. 405. See also Blessed Henry Suso's *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*.

⁴⁶ Knox, *op. cit.*, chap. xii.

Therefore, my heart's beloved—as foolish lovers obtain a garland from their loves, so let my soul receive today, as a New Year's gift, some special grace. . . .⁴⁷

Sometimes angels of young men appeared to him and sang unearthly music and invited him at times "to join in the heavenly melodies" or "to dance in heavenly fashion." But once when Suso was rejoicing (*lustig*) that he could enter into the sufferings of Christ's passion, he was severely rebuked by God and he heard a voice saying,

Do you not know that I am the door through which all true friends of God (*Gottesfreunde*) must press in, if they would attain to true blessedness? You must break your way through my suffering humanity if you would arrive at my pure divinity (*blossen Gottheit*).⁴⁸

This saying not only frightened Suso but seemed to him a hard saying, not pleasing to him. But "he began to learn what he could not earlier and devoted himself to the thought of it." He was beginning to learn that,

thou hast been long enough in the lower schools and hast exercised thyself sufficiently in them and art now full grown. . . . I will take thee to the highest school which is to be found in this world; and thou shalt learn there the highest of all crafts, which shall establish thee in divine peace, and bring thy holy beginnings to a blissful end.⁴⁹

Sometimes in meditating on the problem of suffering, Suso thought of the knight and his vows to serve his lord through all hazards and sufferings. There is a romantic knightliness about Suso which may also account for the too great devotion of some foolish women. One day we are told he was walking in the country. He happened to meet on a narrow pathway a poor respectable woman. . . . He gave up the dry path and went himself into the wet at the side in order to let her pass. The woman turning round said to him: "Dear Master, how comes it that you a gentleman and a priest, give way so humbly to me a poor woman who ought

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, chap. x, p. 30.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁴⁸ Denifle, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.

much more fittingly to have given way to you?" He replied: "Ah dear woman, it is my custom to pay willing deference and honour to all women for the sake of the gentle Mother of God in Heaven."⁵⁰

Suso seems to have wrestled to understand suffering much as Job did. In his biography he tells that when his sister was in disgrace and suffering and he wished to go in search of her the brothers refused to advise him, that "they who were formerly his friends, now turned their faces away, scorning him." Then he thought of poor Job and said, "Now the merciful God must comfort me because I am forsaken of all the world." And as related above he went in search of his sister and found her.

Once Suso, in thinking of Jesus and Judas, held conversation with himself:

And you desire to be a follower of Christ and are unwilling to endure your Judas. Then came quickly the answer, "O, alas Lord if a suffering friend of God had but one Judas, it might be endurable, but in these times all corners are full of Judases and if one departs, four or five others take his place." And a voice within said, "To a just person, no Judas shall be a Judas in the meaning of the name; he shall be to him God's co-worker (*mitwerker*) through whom he will be brought to his best."⁵¹

Suso likewise had a vision about the meaning of suffering. In a vision of the immeasurable joys of heaven where all the heavenly hosts are seen, Eternal Wisdom asked him "to see how my chosen disciples and best beloved friends sit in repose and honor upon their awful judgment seats." "The essential reward" of the contemplative union of the soul with pure divinity was explained to him. Then he was told that he could not remain there now, but that the vision was granted to him so that he would never lose courage, so that he would have "an answer to the complaints of foolish men who say that I allow my friends to fare so badly." Suso is told that it is in God's order that a disordered mind and heart (*ungeordnetes Gemüth*) should be a sharp torment and burden to itself. "My friends have bodily distress but heart's peace but the friends of the world seek bodily comfort and win unrest of

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

heart, soul and disposition (*Gemüthes*).” Suso concludes the chapter with the prayer:

Lord I now plainly see that tribulation does not proceed from thy harshness but rather from thy tender love. Let no one say for the future that thou hast forgotten thy friends. Grant O Lord that these visions may never disappear from the eyes of my heart, so that I may never lose thy friendship.⁶²

Surely Suso’s experience of aloneness and his increasing assurance of his need for God (“so that I may never lose thy friendship”) are not unique to one of a loving heart. To know bodily distress but have “heart’s peace” signifies an ordered mind, at least. The idea of God’s friendship does more than order the mind; it seems to sustain the soul of the individual and to give it a direction toward “essential reward.”

According to Suso, the distinguishing marks of God’s friends are very similar to those described by Tauler. Humility, peace of mind and heart, ready suffering, human understanding are the main characteristics. Service to one’s neighbors is an essential mark. Once when Suso’s “heart was full of divine ecstatic joy,” a woman came asking him to hear her confession. He tried to have her sent to another confessor. She was unwilling to go. He was unwilling to leave the inner joy; the ecstasy left him and God said, “See, you have driven away uncomforted the poor woman with her burdened heart, so I have quickly withdrawn divine consolation from you.”⁶³ This same thought appears again in Eternal Wisdom’s words to Suso, “No one can better show how deeply his heart is affected by my Passion than he who endures it with me in the practice of good works.”⁶⁴ Suso teaches his spiritual daughter that especially for a beginning person, “real blessedness lies not in beautiful words but in good works,” and that she should ask of “this and that friend of God how he began the imitation of Christ, what he suffered, and when and how he succeeded in attaining withdrawal from the world.”⁶⁵

Suso’s *Book of Eternal Wisdom* is didactic in purpose and form. It was also to be used as a devotional book for the cultivation of

⁶² Suso, *Book of Eternal Wisdom*, chap. xii. Denifle, *op. cit.*, p. 380.

⁶³ Denifle, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

the spiritual life. In the preface Suso says that he took upon himself "as a teacher ought to do, the person of all mankind; now he would speak as a sinner and at times as a perfected person." This same book he wrote in Latin with the title *Horologium Sapientiae*. Even the greater part of Suso's autobiography is filled with carefully planned instructions for "a beginning person." Distinctions are made between true and false renunciation of self, between true and false reasoning (*vernunftigkeit*). The first part of the *Book of Eternal Wisdom* tells of the relation between God and His friends and of Christ's passion; the second part treats of the process of dying to the outer realm and of living within the soul; the third part contains a hundred meditations.

Suso's *Book of Truth*, which Denifle considered the most difficult of all the writings of the German mystics to understand, is concerned with speculative thought about the union of the "withdrawn" person with God as to whether or not there is a difference (*eine Änderung*) in the final unity. In this book distinction is made between true and false freedom; for this reason it seems to some to be a polemic against the sect of Free Spirits. Some critics think that Suso wrote this treatise about the time of Meister Eckhart's death as a defense of his teachings. The recollection of Eckhart is fresh in the book. *The Book of Truth* especially furnishes the basis for Oehl's judgment that "Suso stands dogmatically as well as practically quite upon Catholic ground." (*Deutsche Mystiker*, p. 368) The fourth book in *The Exemplar*⁵⁶ is "The Little Book of Letters" which consists of eleven selections from a larger collection of Suso's letters. The letters were written by "the servant of Eternal Wisdom" to Elizabeth Stigel, and other spiritual children. Once when Suso was ill unto death he commended to the compassionate Christ his

dear spiritual children who whether by special bonds of faithfulness or by confession, have lovingly attached themselves to me in

⁵⁶ Suso considered these four writings his most important ones. In later life, c.1362, he revised and edited the writings and put them into *The Exemplar*, with a preface. He also illustrated *The Exemplar*; see Denifle: *Die deutschen Schriften des Seligen Heinrich Seuse*. Suso states also in preface that it seemed best to publish *The Exemplar* so that his superiors would know his writings and that he could defend the truth while he still lived.

this miserable world. . . And now I turn myself away altogether from all creatures, and I turn me wholly to the pure Godhead (*zu der blossen Gottheit*) into the first source (*Ursprung*) of eternal blessedness.⁵⁷

Suso himself recommended

the four good little books to him who wishes to become a good and blessed person and would like God's special intimacy or would strive towards God with heavy sufferings, as He is accustomed to treat his special friends . . . to such a one he recommends especially the letters as comfort . . . To goodhearted folk his book will throw light on the way to divine truth, and to intellectual persons, the right way to the highest blessedness.⁵⁸

In the struggle between King Louis of Bavaria and Pope John XXII (the same who officially canonized Thomas Aquinas in 1323 and had condemned some of Eckhart's writings in 1329), the Dominican Order for the most part stood with the Pope. It is not known how long Suso was prior of the Dominican monastery at Constance, with responsibility for supervision of the twelve convents in the city and others in the province. The struggle between King and Pope had disturbed the city from 1326 on. Sometimes all church services were forbidden. Suso may have left Constance about 1334, or he may have left in 1339 when all clergy who would not conduct public services were asked by the city councillors to leave. Heinrich von Diessenhofen an old chronicler reported that "four Dominican friars left at this time." We have no record of Suso's transfer to the Dominican monastery at Ulm, but there he died in 1366. Tauler's attitude and position in regard to this continuing struggle should be briefly noted. The chronicler Speckle (+ 1589) recorded that Tauler with a Carthusian and an Augustinian had protested to the Pope at the time of the street riots in Strassburg. This may be only a tradition reflecting Tauler's understanding of the people. As a friar he had vowed obedience to his superiors. We know that by 1339 Tauler was active in Basel where the city officials allowed Mass for the dying and had refused to consider the King as a heretic. Tauler was evidently

⁵⁷ Denifle, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

⁵⁸ Suso, "Prolog to Exemplar," in Denifle, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-10.

influential in Basel, for when Heinrich von Nördlingen, a secular priest, arrived from his home province, he secured a place for Heinrich to preach. It is through Heinrich's letters that we learn the names and activities of the group of God's friends in Basel. Tauler had taught that the Church could take away the Holy Sacrament outwardly; "all the Church has given we must allow to be taken from us without murmuring or resistance"; and "no one would or could try to take it from us spiritually."⁵⁹ But the people to whom the Mass meant life in the time of great dying did murmur and resist its being taken away outwardly; so in this teaching Tauler was defeated.

Concerning the heretical sects, in particular the Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirits, both Tauler and Suso spoke distinctly. One is inclined to think that Meister Eckhart's experience may have sharpened their attacks on sects. And both were themselves called heretics. Suso especially suffered in this way; once at a Chapter meeting of Dominicans at Brügge in Flanders, two opponents said that Suso "wrote books in which were false teachings so that all the land was being smirched with heretical baseness." Tauler speaks somewhat violently in his sermons of "the free spirits who glory in their freedom." They are undeveloped persons who stand in their own light. In Suso's *Book of Truth*, there appears "a nameless wild one" with whom he converses,

Whence?—From nowhere.

Who are you?—Nothing.

That's no wonder; tell me who you are?—I am the nameless wild one.

Where does your common sense (*Verständigkeit*) end?—In absolute freedom.

What do you call freedom?—That a man lives according to his own free will without difference and without consideration of what is to come or what has passed.

You are not on the way of truth. . . . there is no order in that.—

What is order?

Right order is when everything belonging to a matter within and without is worked out in reality.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, II, 58.

⁶⁰ Suso, "The Book of Truth," chap. vi, in Denifle, *op. cit.*, 557.

The wild one insists that a person who has become nothing knows no distinction between himself and God and God's son, Jesus Christ, and what the latter could do, he can also; "a certain master" had taught about union of God and the soul without distinction. Answer is made by the one called "the disciple" (Suso) somewhat as follows: In the Godhead there is no distinction, but in the Trinity, there are distinctions but no separations. The body and soul are united but distinct; so in single, simple truth there are distinctions but not separations. Jesus worked naturally as the Father worked in that he is the image of the Father; we, however, are the image of the Trinity. We work more or less as Christ worked according as we are born again. That we become one with Christ and yet distinct is clear according "to essential light" (*wesentliches Licht*). Suso's *Book of Truth* closes with "Enough has been said; one does not arrive at this hidden truth with questions but with the true patience of self-abnegation."⁶¹

Tauler and Suso, practical mystics as they were, give evidence of wrestling with naked Truth, not so much in a speculative way as in an individual practical way, as if to establish for themselves the bases for their teaching concerning the way to truth. They assumed the reality of God's friendship and emphasized growth of the individual soul toward perfection in which man would be united as one with God and thus be restored to his "first uncreated glory."

Tauler, like Eckhart, warned his hearers against thinking out a God for themselves, one "whom you desire to have but who does not exist."⁶² Tauler explained the birth of God in the ground of the soul very much as Eckhart had. In some eighty sermons he speaks almost four hundred times of "the ground of the soul." This ground is beyond reason, where thought has never entered, where there are no forms, no here or there. This Abyss is much more God's dwelling place than heaven or earth. . . . God never separates Himself from this ground.⁶³ Tauler seldom uses the word "spark."

⁶¹ Denifle, *op. cit.*, p. 569.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁶³ Hutton, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

He uses "image" in the ground of the soul as Eckhart used "spark." It is the meeting place so to speak of God and man in man's soul.

To Tauler, Jesus was "a most useful and salutary mirror"—the term *Gottesfreund* as used by him refers some dozens of times, according to the context, to Jesus, the risen Christ, one with God. So there is no particular distinction to be made between God's friends and Jesus' friends.

To Suso it was told by Eternal Wisdom:

Behold assiduous meditation on My Passion makes out of a simple man a master of high knowledge; truly it is a loving book in which everything is to be found.

And at another time, Eternal Wisdom said:

If you had as much science as all the astronomers, if you could discourse as ably of God as all the tongues of men and angels, and if you possessed the treasures of all the masters, not all this could avail to advance you in a good life as much as if you gave yourself and abandoned yourself in all your sufferings to God.⁶⁴

Thus, too, Tauler said:

Now dear children, the Masters in Paris read their big books diligently and turn over the leaves; and all this is very good, but these other men [God's friends] turn over heaven and earth and read therein the surpassing wonders of God. Children, this is the true life . . . and the noble pure and true prize set before all the chosen friends of God.⁶⁵

In introducing a chapter on visions, Suso explains that God in some way (*irgendwie*) gave him an experimental knowledge (*eine empfindliche kundschaft*).⁶⁶ In his writings, there is revealed a constructive energy which imposes on the individual life a law of development. The divine is found less in the states of contemplation than in progress, in a becoming, or a growing, toward

⁶⁴ Suso, *Book of Eternal Wisdom*, chap. xiv, xiii, in Denifle, *op. cit.*, pp. 394, and 385. For questions *re* the nature of God, see Denifle, *op. cit.*, chap. liii, pp. 252 ff.

⁶⁵ Hutton, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

⁶⁶ Suso, *Life*, chap. viii.

perfection.⁶⁷ Suso's phrases for this development are crystal clear. The process is from *entbildet werden von der Creatur*, through *gebildet werden mit Christo*, to *überbildet werden in der Gottheit*, that is, from "being freed from all that belongs to creatures" through "being formed with Christ" into His likeness, to "being reformed in the Godhead."

In the same way, Tauler's chief concern throughout his sermons seems to be explaining "the works and ways which are necessary to the man who rising up desired to enter into the way of truth; then what is necessary to him during his progress; and then how the perfect man may arrive at the goal and what his end will be."⁶⁸ This is Tauler's own summary of a sermon preached earlier on the same text, *Transite ad me, omnes qui concupiscitis me* (Eccles. XXIV, 26), and in it he uses three stages of spiritual growth: 1) beginning (*anfangende*) person; 2) growing (*zunehmende*) person; and 3) the perfect (*vollkommene*) person. So while the distinguishing mark of God's friends may at any single period be suffering, the most distinguishing trait throughout life is growth into the likeness of God himself.

When one recalls the chaos of life in the Rhine valley during the decades in which Tauler and Suso lived—Tauler says in one sermon, "Love has completely disappeared in these evil times"—⁶⁹ and considers in the light of all the confusion, that these teachers taught a way to peace and a foretaste of happiness, even in this life one marvels at their independent firmness. It was Tauler's conviction that

No one ought to allow himself to be in doubt of his own eternal life; he ought to be sure of it, and not only imagine it. That is, he ought to know whether he has God within his heart; and on the other hand, whether he really longs for God. . . . There are as many ways to God as there are persons. . . . We have been placed in this life not only to do works but also that we may know, so that our works may grow out of knowledge

⁶⁷ Delacroix, *Études d'histoire et de psychologie du mysticisme*, p. 367.

⁶⁸ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, II, 36; Hutton, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 175.

as fruit out of the tree. Therefore our work in this life is to gain more knowledge and so to come nearer to God.⁷⁰

The depth of the divine abyss cannot be fathomed by reason; but the depth may be fathomed by deep humility. The less of creature, the more of God, that is a fair bargain. . . . If we would truly know God, it must be by God and with God in God.⁷¹

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 245. Hutton, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

⁷¹ Hutton, *op. cit.*, p. 95.



JOHN TAULER

Gravestone, originally in floor of the Dominican Church, now standing in the Protestant Neue Kirche, Strassburg.

AUSGANG UND RÜCKKEHR DER KREATUR ZU GOTT

(Procession and Return of the Creature to God)

Drawing made by Suso at request of Elizabeth Stigel.

Among the drawings made by Suso, the one bearing the inscription *Ausgang und Rückkehr der Kreatur zu Gott*, found in the Berlin manuscript of the Life of Suso, is outstanding. It does not, as do other drawings of Suso, illustrate a vision. It presents in symbolic figures an exposition of the idea of the "procession and return of the creature to God."

Elizabeth Stigel had written to Suso: "Oh, Master, you speak both out of experience and Holy Scripture, clearly and Christ-like, of the secret of the pure Godhead and of the outgoing and return of the Spirit. Would you not according to your understanding sketch somewhat in pictures the hidden meaning, so that I may understand better? And also, will you please attach in brief figurative language, the explanation of the high thoughts . . . so that they may remain longer in my humble mind."

Beginning in the upper left-hand corner, the inscriptions accompanying the symbolic drawings are as follows:

Threefold ring: *Diz ist der ewigen gotheit wisloses abgruende, daz weder anvang hat noch kein ende.* (This is the unfathomable abyss of the eternal Godhead without beginning or end.)

Tabernacle-like symbol: Bernhart quotes a statement not seen in the drawing: *Daz ist daz bilde gotes in dem vernunftigen gemuete, daz och ewig ist.* (This is God's image in the reasonable nature, that is also eternal.)

Three persons; in the middle, the Holy Spirit: *Dis ist der personen driheit in wesentlicher einikeit, von dem cristanr gelob seit.* (This is the trinity of persons in essential unity, of which the Christian faith speaks.) The emergence of "persons" in the Godhead is the source and original ground of the creature and the prelude of its return unto God.

The angel below the three persons: *Disu figur ist der ussfluzz engelschlicher natur.* (This figure is the outflowing of the angelic nature.)

The falling circle: This represents the fall of the angelic nature.

The figure with folded hands: *Diz ist menschlichü geschaffenheit gebildet nach nach der gottheit.* (This is the human creature made in the image of the Godhead.) The free person now follows either the good or the evil way. Some turn to the evil ways of the world.

The dancing lovers represented by a knight with his sword and a lady in elegant attire: *Diz ist der welt minne, dú nimt mit jame ein ende.* (This is the love of the world of which the end is misery.)

Behind the couple is Death with his scythe: *Diz ist der tot.* (This is Death.)

The kneeling, praying nun bound by the chain of self-conquest: *Minen ker wil ich zu got nemen, wan diz ist gar ein kurtzes leben.* (My burden I will take to God, for this is, indeed, a short life.)

The tall, standing figure, afflicted with swords, arrows, snakes, and scorpions bears the inscription: *Ach lug, wie ich muz sterben und mit Cristus gecrutzet werden!* (Ah, see how I must die and be crucified with Christ.) There follow the steps of the return to God.

The seated figure represents the leaving of self and the waiting in stillness, as if the person himself had died; the inscription is: *Gelassenheit mich berouben wil, wa min ie waz ze vil.* (Desolation would rob me, for that which was mine was, indeed, too much.)

The crucifix (without inscription) held in the out-stretched hand of the tall, standing figure and immediately above the seated figure leads the way to the representations of the mystic union.

The half figure represents the state of meditation; the inscription is: *Die sinne sint mir entwürcket, die hohen kreft sint überwürcket.* (Bereft of senses, the higher powers are transformed.)

The half figure of the Son holding man's soul; the inscription is: *Hie ist der geist in gewungen und wirt in der driheit der*

personen finden. (Here is the spirit conquered by Him, and it will be found in the trinity of persons.) This is the mystic transformation.

Small, standing figure with halo bears the inscription: *Ich bin in got vergangen nieman kan mich hie erlangen.* (I have disappeared in God; no one can reach me here.)

The soul is represented by the figure in the bosom of the first person of the Trinity—the Father; the mystic union is completed and the soul returns by way of the curtained tabernacle to the abyss of the Godhead. The inscription above the line leading to the tabernacle is: *In dem inschlag han ich aller ding vergessen wan es ist grundlous und ungemessen.* (In this enclosure have I forgotten all things, for here all is groundless and beyond measure.)

Chapter V

THE FELLOWSHIP OF GOD'S FRIENDS

Heinrich von Nördlingen introduced medieval saints to each other and spread their reputation for piety. According to records we know that he urged either the prioress or the distinguished nun of a convent to form groups of the Friends of God, and "to strengthen their mystical company (*Verein*)."¹ Pious persons of the community were asked to join the groups. Among the widely separated groups Heinrich encouraged communication through the exchange of prayers, of books, of relics, and of greetings in general. Usually he is introduced with the Dominican nun, Margaret Ebner of the Maria Medingen convent in Bavaria. They addressed each other as friends in God; and they spoke of others as "*ander unser friund in got*."¹

The source of our knowledge of these two friends who were also friends of God is in their correspondence, which is considered by scholars to be the earliest known exchange in German prose of private letters. Hitherto letters had been written by cultured German folk in Latin. The clergy were called upon by others to write the necessary messages of Church and State. In his day, St. Bernard had been a great letter writer.² The nuns, Hildegard of Bingen

¹ Sources used for this chapter were: Johannes Heumann, *Opuscula quibus varia iuris Germanici itemque Historica et Philologia* (Noremburgare, 1747); Philip Strauch, *Margaret Ebner und Heinrich von Nördlingen; ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Mystik* (Freiburg und Tübingen, 1882). Strauch lists in his introduction the ten sources of his study. Ludwig Zoepf, *Die Mystikerin Margaretha Ebner* [c. 1291-1351] (Leipzig, 1914). M. David-Windstosser, *Frauenmystik im Mittelalter, Deutsche Mystiker*, Vol. V. See also A. Pummerer, *Margaretha Ebner, in Stimmen aus Maria-Laach* 81, 1911; *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, XX; Jundt, *Les amis de Dieu au XIV. siècle* 1879; for letters, article in *Realencyklopädie für prot. Theol.* (Vol. V for Margaret Ebner, and Vol. VII for Heinrich von Nördlingen).

² St. Bernard, *Epistolae*, Migne Patr. Lat., Vol. CLXXXII. St. Hildegard, *ibid.*, Vol. CXCVII. See an excellent modern study of St. Hilde-

and St. Brigitta of Sweden, and other inspired women wrote letters of counsel, of instruction, of reproof to pope, kings, clergy, princes, to whomever they chose. Parchment was used, then rolled and tied or sealed. Messengers were not always to be trusted. Sometimes the knights and ladies who loved each other secretly were compelled to write their own letters and deliver them in any way possible. Often friends carried the personal messages in mind and delivered them verbally. Before the fourteenth century the *minnesänger* expressed personal love in German verse. As Steinhausen says, "*Die Minne hatte die Menschen nicht nur deutsch dichten, sondern auf deutsch schreiben gelehrt.*"³

At the time of "the beautiful flowering of mysticism in the Rhine valley" there was increased exchange of letters among the religious, and pious laity. It was as if man being pressed upon every side by a world from which "love had wholly departed" and finding inward peace through "*innerlichkeit*" and communion with God, not only wished to share his experience but needed for himself the experiences of like-minded persons. It seems historically evident that letters "formed an important bond (*ein wichtiger Bindemittel*) for a wide circle of laity and clergy, women and men blessed with the new spirit. One could almost speak of "an organization of mystic correspondence by letter (*einer Organisation des mystischen Briefverkehrs*)."⁴ Zoepf considers it no accident that this first German correspondence should come in the mystic period.⁵

Dominican monks took seriously their task of supervising the education of the young nuns. It was natural that the nuns, especially the sensitive and ambitious ones, should express loving admiration

gard in Lucy Menzies, *Mirrors of the Holy*. The book contains "Ten Studies in Sanctity" and are short biographies of women saints. For St. Brigitta of Sweden, see *Acta SS. Oct. IV*, 419. She tells that she dictated the Rules of the Order of Holy Saviour to *viro religioso, amico dei*.

³ Steinhausen, Georg, *Geschichte des deutschen Briefes*, p. 11. See also the interesting collection of German love letters by Zeitler, *Deutsche Liebesbriefe aus neun Jahrhunderten*.

⁴ Steinhausen, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁵ Zoepf., *op. cit.*, pp. 145 ff.

for their father confessors. Many letters written by the monks, were like Suso's to Elizabeth Stagel in that they were largely concerned with the way of salvation and with answering questions concerning God. Often the authors seem troubled by a too-personal sentiment of admiration. In the light of their calling, that was natural also.

Heinrich von Nördlingen was a secular priest who in October, 1332, came on a regular visit to Maria Medingen to hear confessions, and the like. Margaret Ebner was in deep sorrow over the death of an intimate friend, a sister in the convent. In her convent life she had always practiced austere ways, particularly in long periods of silence. To honor her friend, she now was keeping silence each week from Thursday to Sunday, and at other times. So she came reluctantly to meet her fate, so to speak. Heinrich was able to assure her of his understanding of her sorrow and thus, as Zoepf expresses it, "the bridge was built for mutual understanding." Margaret addressed him four years later as "my genuine friend in God."⁶ Their correspondence has "mystic love" and personal love of man for woman (the letters are mostly Heinrich's) so mixed that they are not easily separated. There is a freedom of expression not found in earlier German, and not evident in the correspondence of the next century. Thus these letters are considered as distinctively belonging to the *Gottesfreunde* of the middle of the fourteenth century.

Heinrich von Nördlingen knew himself to be a man of God. "The wonderful great work which God to his honor has begun through me and still continues in many a human heart,"⁷ was his way of describing his vocation. Today we doubtless would consider him a very human, practical, and lovable person. He widened his own world through journeys, usually with some purpose, either personal or altruistic. At times he was exceedingly enthusiastic; sometimes he was fearfully depressed, calling himself "a great sinner and unworthy priest," "poor worm," "blind leader."⁸ He asked to be nourished spiritually by others whom he believed excelled

⁶ David-Windstosser, *op. cit.*, p. 194. According to Oehl, W., *Deutsche Mystikerbriefe*, p. 301, Heinrich visited Margaret Ebner eight times.

⁷ Zoepf, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

⁸ David-Windstosser, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

him; this was true to the teaching of Tauler and others that if one could not help himself to find God, he should go twenty—yes a hundred miles to find a true friend of God.⁹ In the one letter which we have of Tauler there is a sentence which indicates an indulgent smile or teasing spirit in regard to Heinrich. Tauler was thanking Margaret Ebner and the prioress for greetings and was sending small cheese in return. Concerning Heinrich he says, "Know that brother Heinrich wishes well, and does well, and says the Mass. He is quite angry at not securing leave of absence"—which if granted was to include a visit to Maria Medingen. In conclusion Tauler asks simply, "Pray for me and my sins," as if it were the usual request between Christians.¹⁰

It might seem from the letters as if Heinrich's life began with the meeting of Margaret. Jundt in his *Les amis de Dieu de XIV. siècle* states that it began with the struggle between Louis of Bavaria and the Pope.¹¹ When in 1338 King Louis ordered that the Church sacraments be administered, Heinrich stayed in Nördlingen, his birthplace, and endeavored to continue with his other work and interests. He finally fled to Augsburg, then he applied for a pastorate in Fessenheim. He consulted the Countesses of Graisbach. He wrote to Margaret that "fear and trembling are come upon me" and asked if she had any revelations concerning him to write. He asked for special prayers because on October 22, 1338, in Fessenheim, he was to defend his position of loyalty to the papacy.¹² Heinrich was not chosen for the vacancy. He went next to Constance, perhaps to see Suso. In Constance the priests were given until early in January 1339 to decide either to administer the sacraments and conduct regular church services and thus be loyal to the king and people, or to leave. Heinrich also visited the convent in Aargau where Agnes, Queen of Hungary was living as an associate.¹³ Early in January, 1339, he reached

⁹ Lehmann, *Tauler*, II, 24.

¹⁰ *Er zirnet vast umb des urlaub.*—Tauler's Letter LVII in Strauch, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

¹¹ Jundt, *op. cit.*, pp. 39 ff.

¹² Strauch, *op. cit.* See Letters XXIX, XXX, etc.

¹³ Agnes, Queen of Hungary (1281-1344) daughter of Albrecht I of Austria, wife of Andreas III of Hungary, lived after the death of her

Basel where Tauler was influential with the civil authorities and the religious, and secured for him both work and friends.

Once at least Heinrich wrote to Margaret,

the better part of the population of Basel, poor and rich children of God, men and women, priests, monks, bourgeois, canons, nobles and commons come early in the morning and take places in the church . . . the greater part of Basel come to confess to me, if only I could hear them all!¹⁴

Often Heinrich was too busy with preaching and the hearing of confessions so that there was no time for meditation. He reports illness from overwork, headaches, and eye strain. At times he had to omit the saying of Mass to write to Margaret. Often the messenger stood at his side as he wrote, so that he felt hurried and could not write all he wished.

Heinrich and Margaret met the second time in November, 1341. After his return to Basel he wrote of "the wonderful change in you, a sign of heavenly living...my heart was marvelously touched and set in wild misery when I separated from you. Alas! how fearfully must your parting from God be, when it hurts so terribly to be separated from His own." Sometimes Heinrich expressed his love for her by including prayers to which "the grace of God" urged him. Sometimes he wrote of "her union with Jesus Christ, the highest Good" and dwelt on "the divine kisses."

Great Joy of my heart, holy comfort of my soul, the complete hope and refuge of all my life, I wish for you that your Bridegroom lead you as He did his disciples to the mount of all perfection and that He will speak in your heart the eternal word in the purest truth and innermost sweetest communion, as ever came to the heart of His chosen ones.¹⁵

In a letter of 1346 or 1347, Heinrich sends the personal greet-

husband in the convent, Königsfelden in Aargau which had been founded by her mother.

¹⁴ Jundt, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

¹⁵ Strauch, *op. cit.*, Letters XXXIII, XXXV: David-Windstosser, *op. cit.*, p. 177; *ibid.*, p. 167. "Chosen Ones" (*auserwählten*) is a common synonym for "friends of God."

ings to Margaret from various members of the group of God's friends in Basel:

Frau Falkenstein of your Order of Klingenthal in Basel sends me in humble zeal of her heart a love token and desires that you pray faithfully to God for her and her children, for her in person and for all her possessions. This I candidly desire with her, for she is our great friend. The same request is desired and made also by our Margaretha of the Golden Ring and many of our other friends, especially Heinrich von Rheinfelden, my mother and sister, a knight by name Pfaffenheim, and another knight and his wonderful God-illuminated wife—the Landspergs. I cannot name all who desire this. If I should commend to you ourselves and all the friends whom God has given us, I should never have done.¹⁶

Journeying was difficult in those days. Sometimes Heinrich had to plan for others, and when one remembers that there was no postal system, it is clear that long before a journey details had to be worked out. In 1345 Heinrich wrote to Margaret asking her to care for Frau Frick, "the suffering turtle-dove," who was on her way from Nördlingen to Basel. Heinrich's mother and sister had already followed him. Frau Frick was to be urged in his name to get all things needed for the journey especially a wagon. "God sent me with his lambs among wolves,"¹⁷ he wrote in the summer of 1346 when his mother and Frau Frick had gone with him to Sulz in upper Alsace. He suggested that the inhospitality of the people in the new place and the general inconvenience were a punishment for having had too much pleasure in his easy life in Basel. Frau Frick upon her return called Basel "paradise" in comparison with "the purgatory" where they had been.¹⁸

Heinrich von Nördlingen was not a scholar though he was a man of learning. He knew the latest books, i.e., writings, for this was the age before printing in Europe. He borrowed books. We have a record of his asking Tauler for *Horologium Sapientiae* (whether Suso's book or not is uncertain), and sending it to the

¹⁶ Heumann, *op. cit.*, Letter, p. 364. Strauch, *op. cit.*, Letter XLV.

¹⁷ David-Windstosser, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-183.

¹⁸ Strauch, *op. cit.*, Letter LII.

prior of Kaisheim to be copied. Books were also sent to the countesses who had befriended him. He had intrusted a book belonging to Schönenfeld to a student traveling from Paris via Basel to Kaisheim. The student did not deliver the book; so Heinrich, frightened, had to write to him. In 1345 he recommended the purchase of the three parts of Aquinas' *Summa* because he trusted to God that "this book will be of service to me and many persons. I know nothing on earth of temporal things that I would rather own."¹⁹

In the same year he sent to Medingen and to other centers copies of Mechthild von Magdeburg's *Das fliessende Licht der Gottheit* which he had translated over a period of two years from "strange German" into "our German." It was to him "the most enjoyable German and the most touching, *innerlichst* love treasure (*minen schatz*) that he had ever read in the German language. In a letter of 1346, he writes of Margaret's relation to her "royal bridegroom, Jesus," and paraphrases at length the experience of Mechthild who "became intoxicated with contemplation of the Divine Countenance." He adds that "here and in similar ways the great friends of God reveal to us the spiritual ascension (*Himmelfahrt*) of the inner self."²⁰ Consequently such books were greatly treasured in the convents especially by the prioress or the nun responsible for the education of the young sisters. Books of stories, extracts from writings, letters of the visiting clergy were kept, copied, shared, and sent to distant places. Heinrich had Margaret's *Pater Noster* (paraphrase of the Lord's prayer) illumined as a gift to the convent. One of Margaret's prayers is as follows:

I pray my Lord that in your pure love you give us a sure union in the innermost Good which you yourself are and ask, my Lord, for the sake of strong help which you gave us in your human holy life (*in deinem menschlichen heiligen Leben*) . . . that we become aware within (*inne werden*) of your presence visible and invisible, of what true love toward you is; that our pleasure be in naught else but your holy suffering and in your holy sacra-

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Letter LX. Oehl, *op. cit.*, Letter XX, p. 326.

²⁰ Zoepf, *op. cit.*, p. 125, note. David-Windstosser, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-187.

ments and that you teach us a true withdrawal from this world and a complete denial of self and a clear understanding.²¹

As illustrative of the educational stories, the one below about Ellin von Krailsheim was told in a letter to Margaret:

Especially Ellin von Krailsheim to whom God sent me in Zimmern; for eighteen years and longer she endured in wonderful love the suffering of God, with a wounded heart and was severely affected; she was for seven years robbed of speech. And as God willed, he struck her down so that she lay five days and knew nothing that was going on around her, just as it happened to St. Paul. And then the naked truth was revealed to her; she was granted entrance into the inner holiness of the Father's heart. She was made god in God, united with the one One (*da ward sie in Gott vergottet, in dem einigen Ein vereint*), bound in Love, surrounded with Light, filled with Joy, and ecstasy so that now her life is a continuous soaring above all unpleasant things, and she waits also upon her dear Jesus Christ in peaceful submission to His will, in loving contemplation, in patient waiting with heart and eyes streaming because of love . . . and whatever is like this experience, so that no one can fully tell it.²²

For the relics of saints, Heinrich had more of an enthusiasm than the Friends of God in general seem to have had. In 1345 he had sent Margaret a copy of a devout letter concerning the robe of God, which had been recommended to him by "our great friend von Niederlant."²³ In one letter he complained that Margaret did not seem to appreciate a relic which he had sent. As illustrative of his zealous care in finding genuine relics, a letter of 1347 spoke "of a very dear relic which has been in the possession of high princes; but I have no guarantee (*Beweisbrief*) for it. Now I desire with my whole heart that you beg God to tell you the truth about it."²⁴

²¹ *Pater Noster* is in Strauch, p. 161. Also in Preger, W., *Geschichte der deutschen Mystik im Mittelalter*, Part II, pp. 287 ff.

²² Letter XVI, 1335, in David-Windstosser, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

²³ Letter XLV, quoted Jundt, *op. cit.*, p. 379. This may refer to Ruysbroeck. The Friends of God had extracts and perhaps entire copies of his *The Adornment of Spiritual Marriage*. There is also indirect evidence that Suso and Tauler visited Ruysbroeck.

²⁴ Letter L, in David-Windstosser, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

In 1346 he went to Cologne for relics of the 11,000 virgins. The Cistercian nuns in Burtscheid gave him a finger of the Holy Agnes on condition that it be treasured. So in sending it to Margaret, Heinrich wrote, "Now I beg you to preserve zealously and carefully *Saint Agnes' heiligtum*."²⁵ We have evidence that Heinrich was now and then sent on important missions, for instance in 1347, the Bishop of Basel requested the Bishop of Bamberg to send to the cathedral in Basel the remains of "the holy Kaiser Heinrich VI and his wife Kunigunde." The bishop recommended Heinrich as *magnae discretionis vir, honestus vir*. Heinrich was successful and on his return journey visited the convent, Maria Medingen, from July 26 to 28. It was during one of Heinrich's absences from Basel that Margaret of the Golden Ring wrote to Margaret Ebner, telling her how much the group missed "his true teaching, his wise counsel, his private and open warnings and scoldings."²⁶

Other gifts besides relics were exchanged. Heinrich urged Margaret in 1347 not to forget to thank Agnes, Queen of Hungary, "most faithfully for the gulden" which he had transmitted for a new building in Maria Medingen. In the same year Gertrude of Bietenberg, the wife of Rulman Merswin, sent to Margaret some white cloth for a robe and a scapular with the request that she pray for her and "for our dear father Tauler who was your messenger."²⁷ At least once Heinrich asked Margaret "to be so kind if she had extra money to give something to dear Chüntzlin who brings the letter to you; he is from Nördlingen and is dear to me."²⁸

Money for chapels and altars was collected among the Friends of God and sent to each other. There is a biography written before 1356 by Berthold von Bombach concerning his contemporary Luitgart (1291-1348) who was the founder of a hermitage for women in Wittichen.²⁹ Bertholt's first sentence in the biography is: "I thought that I would write of a wonder so that all persons reading

²⁵ Letter XLVI, in *ibid.*, p. 188.

²⁶ Letter LVI, in Strauch, *op. cit.*

²⁷ Letter XX, in Zoepf, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

²⁸ Letter XXVIII, in David-Windstosser, *op., cit.*, p. 179.

²⁹ Bertholt von Bombach, *Leben der seligen Luitgart, der Stifterin von Wittichen*, in Moné's: "Quellen Sammlung der badischen Landesgeschichte," III, pp. 438-468. See also Jundt, *op. cit.*, pp. 35 ff.

this will be inspired. Amen." Luitgart had been a Beguine in Oberwolfach who after the local priests had "insulted God and Christendom" by asking her to leave town was directed to establish a retreat. The biographer continues:

At the same time there was a friend of God, a sister in Strassburg, to whom a voice came at three different times when she was praying and said, "there will come a request from across the Rhine from a new establishment. Whoever will give a half-penny (*helbling*) is assured of eternal life."

The Friends of God of Strassburg made a contribution to Luitgart in 1323. Jundt states that Luitgart and her associates were Franciscans (tertiaries) and that "she shared the mystic tendencies of the friends of God." She lived twenty years after the completion of the hermitage and was instructed on theological questions by the hermit Gerard.

One old manuscript copy of Mechthild von Magdeburg's book, in the German of the Oberrhein (perhaps Heinrich's translation) had been sent to "forest sisters" who lived in four houses near Einsiedeln as a gift from Margaret of the Golden Ring of Basel. Heinrich von Rumersheim of Basel had sent it with the following instruction:

Ir sont wissen dz das buch,
dz uch wart von der zem
Guldin Ringe dz, do heist,
das liecht der Gotheit, des
sont ir wol warnemin, also
dises soll dienen in all huser
des waldes und sol us dem walde
niemer komen und sol ie ein monat
in eini huse sin . . . (. . . the book
shall serve all houses in the forest
and shall not leave the forest ever; it
shall be one month in a house . . .)

One of the sisters answered that the book was received. The instructions were repeated and then—"know that the book will not be loaned outside the forest."⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Morel, Gall, *Offenbarung der Schwester Mechthild von Magdeburg*. Introduction, p. vi.

Margaret's attitude in the struggle between the King and the Pope worried Heinrich.⁸¹ King Louis was a patron of Maria Medingen. The Dominican provincial general had allowed the convent freedom in regard to the celebration of the Mass. Margaret was but twenty-two years old when King Louis became the hero of Bavaria. His people loved him for his knightly ways. Tradition tells that he was both handsome and virtuous. Margaret in the face of possible excommunication prayed for the Kaiser. She had dreams in which he conquered all his enemies. Concerning her attitude, she seemed free from worry for she held God responsible; "Lord, if you permit me to do wrong, you must atone for it." Margaret's reinterpretation of the dream concerning the King's victory over his enemies changed when he suddenly died in 1347; she said that the dream meant victory over "the enemies of his soul. God would never leave him but would himself prepare him for eternal life." A friend of God (*ein friunt gotz*) considered the King's death as a punishment for sinners. God confirmed this opinion for Margaret. When Karl IV was chosen by the Pope as successor to Louis, Margaret in a letter to Heinrich called him, "Your king." He replied, "You should not call him *my* king but the Christian king." Heinrich had been troubled about Margaret's going to Mass throughout the interdict but such was his admiration for her spiritual life that he wrote, "Since the Saviour has invited you in so friendly a manner and so tenderly to touch His sacred body, I would not dare to oppose you or any of God's friends."⁸¹ Later he wrote that he permitted celebration of the Mass in his church in Basel though he took no part. Tauler's letter of 1346 tells that Heinrich "says the Mass," which evidently is more than a casual bit of news.

In the collection of letters is one from Abbot Ulrich II of Kaisheim to Margaret. It is written during the scourge of the Black Death. It states that on the day when he had been in Maria Medingen, seven priests of Kaisheim and a novice had died; on the next, a novice died and that six were still ill. He asks for her prayers for the dead and the living. Heinrich wrote of "the serious preoccupation of the Friends of God" in Basel

⁸¹ Zoepf, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-143. See also Jundt, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

since they had seen "the divine hand striking the world and causing to perish in such a terrible death so many thousands."³² He told her that some were expecting worse calamities within three years, or within ten years. What did she think? Should he preach more concerning things to come? Ought he to encourage the practice of pious persons who were distributing their temporal goods giving "some to the Friends of God whom they knew in all countries." Margaret answered that in such matters one conformed to the will of God and practiced sacrifice in the interest of personal salvation.

Heinrich also consulted her about the general belief that the Jews had poisoned the wells. She replied that God had told her it was true; they had done so but that He had allowed this to happen because of the great abuses and sins in Christendom.³³

In Heinrich's letters, there is no evidence of original speculative thought. Through association with Tauler and Suso and through his reading, he doubtless acquired a mystic vocabulary and manner of preaching. God told Margaret that Heinrich was a true joy of my holy divinity and a sure follower of my holy humanity; he shall enjoy me with Cherubim and shall contemplate me with the Seraphim. . . . I will draw him into "the wild Oneness" of my holy Godhead in which he shall lose himself in me through love and will sink into the holy mirror of my holy Godhead so that he shall clearly behold my divine glory.

He is to Margaret "God's true angel in the light of truth, her teacher sent by God," and ten years later in 1344, she calls him "the truest friend of God" she knows. She evidently was troubled about his exceeding busy-ness. Her friend who had died revealed to her: "Have no concern about him; were not the apostles in constant work and trouble?"³⁴

In 1334, two years after their first meeting, Heinrich had asked Margaret to write her visions, a request which she met with fear, as did most of the religious writers of the day for the very good reason that humility was the cardinal virtue. It was the

³² Zoepf, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 140. Strauch, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

³⁴ Zoepf., *op. cit.*, pp. 156-157.

need for books of instruction as well as secret ambition which caused those who had unusual experience to overcome their reluctance to write. As in the case of Suso, it was also the need to dispel current charges of heresy. Usually the writing was the collaboration between two nuns or between a monk and a nun. In Margaret's case, the prioress Elizabeth Scheppach did the actual writing. St. John, particularly honored by Dominicans, was her heavenly guide. Heinrich was in Strassburg, "detained there in great work of God," when he received in 1345 the first copy of her writings. He writes,

What shall I write to you? Your God-inspired mouth robs me of speech. So instead of saying much, I thank you through God for the heavenly treasure which He has given us through you and will grant yet more as I expect from His kindness. So I ask you in God as I did earlier, to write zealously all that God has told you. . . . I shall add nothing either in Latin or in German nor shall I omit anything, until I have read it through with you and have understood it from your mind and heart. I am also especially pleased that the eternal truth has given you an unusual witness for this work. Therefore you are responsible to give your heart and mouth [words] to this task.³⁵

The *Revelations* of Margaret Ebner edited by Heinrich cover the period from 1312-1348. They are monotonous, with very little of the imaginative in color or picture. Their chief value for us lies in the evidence of culture in the life of many cloistered women of the Middle Ages. Her letters to Heinrich were evidently edited and made a part of the *Revelations*.

David-Windstosser finds in spite of the many repetitions in her revelations "now and then, a spontaneous flaming word, a cry full of divine pain, a sudden climax in speech, word upon word, cry upon cry, rising to Heaven as the towers of a glorious cathedral."³⁶

Lochner describes a medieval portrait of Margaret Ebner in which she appears as "unusually gentle and lovable with her eyes

³⁵ Letter XLI, in David-Windstosser, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

³⁶ David-Windstosser, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

streaming toward heaven." ³⁷ Heinrich's names for her seem foolish to us. She is

the noble daughter of the king of Heaven—the precious pearl of God—the dear espoused beloved whom Jesus Christ had chosen from eternity—the dove who has built her nest in the bleeding and burning wounds of the love of our Saviour—the blessed daughter of the Holy Spirit issuing from the heart of the Father as a flower the perfume of which rejoices all pure hearts and the sight of whom fills with joy all the hosts of heaven. Sometimes as a kind of climax as if he had exhausted the names he doubles her name, "Margaretha-Margaretha!" There are the more personal terms, such as "my beloved comfort, my soul's salvation, my heart's great friend, my most beloved treasure." All these names no doubt furnished material for the nun's long hours of meditation and silence.

The relation between Heinrich and Margaret is scarcely that of father confessor and "spiritual daughter." Suso and the young nun Elizabeth Stagel were in this relationship. Suso spoke of having other "spiritual daughters." Sister Katrei of the laity was for years referred to as Eckhart's spiritual daughter. In an old chronicle, reported by Strauch, Margaret Ebner is called Tauler's daughter.

Also in convent Medingen there lived at the same time in great devotion and holiness S. Margaretha Ebnerin, to whom the great preacher and holy father Johannes Tauler had much grace and love in God. ³⁸

One can imagine that the record was made on the basis of Margaret's enthusiasm for Tauler. There is no known evidence of anything like the relation between Suso and Elizabeth Stagel. Sometimes a churchman seemed interested in creating a saint, as for instance, Konrad of Marburg in relation to the much beloved St. Elizabeth. It may be that underneath Heinrich's encouraging

³⁷ Lochner, Georg, *Leben und Gesichte der Christina Ebnerin*, p. 135.

³⁸ Strauch found it in a manuscript, a chronicle of the Dominican order. *Item im closter medingen lept in den selben ziten in grosser andacht und hailigkeit S. Margareta Ebnerin zuo der der gross brediger und sällig vatter Johannes Tauler vil gnad und liche in Gott hatt.*

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Margaret to be refashioned in Christ and transformed in God for the sake of the people, there was some desire for personal distinction in the ecclesiastical world. It was difficult in those days of piety to be unique. The discipline of monastic orders was against individualism. However, in looking over the old chronicles as quoted by Wilms in *Das Beten der Mystikerinnen* (particularly from chronicles kept by Dominican nuns) one is impressed with their activities. Many tasks in the convent were assigned according to individual talents of writing or drawing or music. Some kept the chronicles. Others composed songs of praise; the nuns in one convent took down the hymn of sixteen hundred words as Adelheid von Hiltegarthausen sang them.³⁹

Ludwig Zoepf in his interesting study of Margaret Ebner resists and opposes with good reasoning the ideas of Pfister⁴⁰ in his too Freudian interpretation of the relationship between Margaret and Heinrich. Zoepf grants that certain letters of Heinrich show suppressed and no doubt perverted ideas. To ask for her sleeping garment which had been nearest her pure self and then to wear it himself can to moderns mean but one thing. Elizabeth Stigel once asked Suso for "the foot-cloth" which he treasured as a symbol of humility, and she sent small pieces of cloth embroidered with IHS to be worn against the same letters over his heart. These she distributed to friends.⁴¹ Margaret Ebner's use of the wooden image of the Christ child⁴² and some of her visions are also to be interpreted as manifestations of her mother self. Many pious persons in the Middle Ages took too literally the following of Jesus. The women who thought of themselves as "brides of Christ" needed some outlet for the imagination.

³⁹ Wilms, Hieronymus, *Das Beten der Mystikerinnen* in "Quellen u. Forschungen zu Geschichte des Dominikanerordens in Deutschland."

⁴⁰ Pfister, O., *Hysteria und Mystik bei Margaretha Ebner*. "Zentralblatt für Psychoanalyse, I Jahrgang, Heft 10-11.

⁴¹ Denifle, *Die Schriften des seligen Heinrich Suso's* (11 Briefe), p. 621.

⁴² The wooden doll can be seen today in the convent Maria Medingen near Dilligen, Bavaria. After Margaret's death (1351) pilgrimages were made to her grave. A chapel dedicated to her honor. In 1744 the prior of the Dominican monastery (three hours away) sent her writings to Rome asking that the papal court declare her "Blessed." No reply was given.

With some persons the teaching concerning the birth of God in the soul of man had a relation to the choice of the Virgin Mary as Mother of God. Margaret learned in a revelation that the Holy Mother was "frightened because of the great strength" which she received from her Christ child. Once she asked Our Dear Lady to help her receive "the stigmata" as St. Francis had and the loving answer was, "You ask me for such unlike things that I do not know what I should do for you," an answer which satisfied Margaret.⁴³ When she asked the Christ child how he could be poor if the three kings had brought many treasures, he answered "such good is not the highest good. I did not come from heaven to use earthly riches. My mother gave the gifts to poor people."⁴⁴

Much has been written about "the mysticism of women" usually from the point of view that their more delicate bodies and minds were especially sensitive and susceptible to hysteria and the like. Maybe so—it is a study in itself. However, in the Middle Ages both men and women valued "the grace of tears" and knew something of the art of suffering. When one reads of Margaret Ebner's crying the name of Jesus thousands of times, it is fair to her to remember that the beloved St. Francis "set himself to pray, lifting up his hands and eyes unto heaven, and with exceeding great devotion and fervour said, My God! My God! and thus saying and sorely weeping, he abode till morning, always repeating, My God! My God! and naught beside."⁴⁵

Heinrich and Margaret may be viewed as "the lesser mystics" who form with others the circle around the great mystics. Studying the available records gives one the impression not necessarily of religious geniuses but of honest souls seeking a way of salvation and finding it in the idea of possible union with Christ as the Bridegroom or with God as friend.

Not all God's friends were like the gentle Margaret. In the Dominican convent of Engelthal was Christine Ebner, an old

⁴³ David-Windstosser, *op. cit.*, p. 151; also p. 145.

⁴⁴ Zoepf, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

⁴⁵ Quoted from "The Little Flowers of St. Francis" by Rufus Jones in *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 153.

portrait of whom Lochner describes as showing "a dark-eyed earnest severe face in which one looks in vain for the attraction of the womanly charm of Margaret Ebner." Lochner spent twenty years with the material for the biography of Christine which he published in 1872 with some degree of shame at the meager results of his work.⁴⁶ He produced, however, convincing evidence that Christine and Margaret were not sisters, as had been generally assumed, and also that Christine was not abbess of the convent in Engelthal. Before considering the personality of Christine Ebner, it is in place to see another nun in the same convent, a more colorful, if not as great, person as Christine. She was Adelheid Langman, also "God's friend."⁴⁷

Adelheid's dreams are different from those of Margaret and of Christine. Like them she laments over the evil times, but briefly—"O dear Lord now I hear so much of how the Evil Spirit deceives the people, I wish you had never created me." She prays for souls in purgatory so fervently that "the Lord gave her 25,000 souls and steadied as many folk." She was to pray unceasingly for others, "even if they are not converted; yet on the last day I [the Lord] will keep them." It was on Easter Day, 1331, after she had participated in the Mass, that the Lord forgave her sins, gave her 30,000 souls out of purgatory, and as many sinners and as many good folk were steadied and He said, "I take you today into the company (*gemeinschaft*) of all my friends. Up to this time you have not been one of God's friends."⁴⁸

In conversation with the Lord, He sometimes asked, "My beloved, my trusted and dear spouse and my dear child, what is troubling you?" Once He told her, "If I draw your soul from without your body into my Godhead, then you become ill but if I pour my Godhead into you, then you are strong."⁴⁹ It would seem from this that Adelheid was troubled at times about her relation to God. But she like Christine knew that she dreamed these things. Her records show the exact time "when she came

⁴⁶ Lochner, *op. cit.*, Preface.

⁴⁷ Strauch, P., *Die Offenbarungen der Adelheid Langman*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

to herself." The assurance of strength when God pours Himself into her body would indicate that like Margaret Ebner she knew that "God is not a robber of the mind but an illuminator of the same." Adelheid's visions are often colorful. Sometimes Adelheid dreamed of being clothed by the Lord in white, red, and green—white for purity, red for her love to Christ, and green for His divinity and the assurance of His presence.⁵⁰

There are according to Strauch and others very few references in medieval literature to suicide. Adelheid records at least two stories of men who came to her for counsel:

A builder, Herman by name, told her that for ten years he had been tempted to kill himself. He asked her for help. She taught him five *Pater Nosters*, five *Ave Marias*. He answered, "My suffering, woman, is so great that I do not pray." She said, "Say only Jesus Christ." He replied, "But my suffering is so great that I dare not speak." "Then *think* the name of Jesus and *hold* Him in your heart." "Dear woman, I'll do as you say." He went away. She prayed for him. He came in a short while to thank the Lord and her and he came once a year after that to thank her.⁵¹

The other was a man named Marquot from Nüremberg [not far from Engelthal]. He did not tell her the nature of his temptation which had afflicted him for nine years and he had told no one. She told him that she knew his temptation was to kill himself. He admitted that she was right, cried lamentably, and asked for her prayers. She taught him a prayer also. He came to thank her. He went to Paris and later was a good teacher of the Bible.⁵²

There are records of other troubled souls relieved by her counsel. But not all followed her advice.

A noble woman, very beautiful and a widow, came to be prayed for and advice. Adelheid told her to become a nun. "I will not

⁵⁰ One can understand why the colors of the cathedral windows were chosen with meaning.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 44. In Suso's *Life*, chap. xli, is the story of a stranger who had planned suicide by drowning but was deterred by a voice which gave him Suso's name, which he "had never heard before."

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

become a nun," answered the widow. "I want to marry again." She did marry a rich man and within four weeks, she became ill and died.⁵³

Adelheid Langman received letters from "a chosen friend of our Lord Jesus Christ, the prior of Kaisheim."⁵⁴ She asked him to pray for her. Many other stories are available to illustrate the personal interests of the Friends of God and to emphasize what might be called their individualistic ideal—"as many ways to God as persons." Tauler taught more than once "As varied as persons are, so varied are their ways to God (*so ungleich die Menschen sind, so ungleich sind auch ihre Wege zu Gott*)."⁵⁵

Christine Ebner (1277-1356) usually named as a friend of God in historical accounts of this early German religious life was the tenth child of her family. She loved the truth from her earliest years, having lied but twice, once in her sixth year and in her seventh year "in childish ignorance." In her seventh year she wished to begin the life of a religious by begging. She also at this time gave away everything that she liked. At ten she was put under the instruction of a woman teacher. In the house lived Heinrich von Ratenburg who taught her how to confess, to prepare for communion; and he allowed the child to participate in the Mass. At twelve she entered the convent where her sister Elizabeth was a nun.

She began early in life severe ascetic practices, such as lying on the cold ground, using rods for scourging herself, and thorns and nettles for discomfort. At fourteen, she cut a cross over her heart. A vision occurred about this time when she was ill. Seven nuns of the convent had died during Lent. John the Evangelist⁵⁶ told her that she would not die. The convent tasks such as waiting on the table were so annoying that she cried fearfully. When at sixteen she asked the Lord what she should do to show her love, He answered, "You shall never complain of a single thing

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁵⁵ Lehmann, *Tauler*, II, 245.

⁵⁶ Lochner, *op. cit.* See notes 37, 48. Besides the Virgin, the saints most honored in the Dominican convent were Peter, Paul, John the Baptist, Mary Magdalene, and especially John the Evangelist.

that man does to you. Obey me and thank God for His grace." At twenty-four, in 1301, she dreamed that she was with child, conceived of the Lord, and that later she had carried the child to the assembly of nuns in the refectory, declaring it to be Jesus. In her thirty-first year, she refused to nurse the sick.

Upon order from God, she began in her fortieth year to tell her visions to her father confessor. During the next seven years, she wrote them using the third person. In the records, she indicates that she knew that the visions were not given in her normal state, for she writes frequently, "and when she came to herself again." God told her, "I have acted toward you not as creature but as to my dear friend . . . I came to you as a shining light and enlightened your reason (*Vernunft*)."⁵⁷ Springtime was to follow her winter and she would be given fruit from God's own garden of joys.

There is an interesting vision in which she learned she had not died at fifteen because there was so much praying for her on earth that it reached heaven and "the Trinity conferred," with the conclusion that in order to accomplish the good which they could with her they would require years. [She lived to be nearly eighty years old.]⁵⁸

In another vision she attended a dance in heaven and the streets were brightly lighted; there were lilies and roses. The guests were those who came to heaven with the greatest purity and who on earth had practiced sweet content and had been a part of the kingdom of heaven on earth. God was present, and Our Lady. Each person knew why each had deserved heaven. Whenever the Lord lifted His foot there was "a wild fire-light" which fell upon roses and lilies and those nearest Him. King David was there. Some one asked—Why this great festival? The Lord answered, "Today is a great day . . . my folks on earth honor me, hence this great joy in the kingdom of heaven."⁵⁹

In another vision Christine learned from God of the sins of the women of the times. They were 1) that women adorned their bodies too much; 2) that they were hard toward poor

⁵⁷ Lochner, *op. cit.*, p. 19. ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

people; 3) that they judged widows and the poor disdainfully and not in accordance with God's praise.⁶⁰ Rumor has it that she was not particularly popular in her convent.

When "the self scourgers" came to Engelthal in July, 1349, (the Black Death time) she asked God to tell her something of His attitude toward the whipping processions. He answered that those whom He has instructed in this way (to join the scourgers) were to fulfill the work of God, and that He expected the people to receive them. She recorded that the people of Engelthal ran to the ceremonies, "noble and otherwise, young and old, as thirsty deer to a spring."⁶¹

One year before the great earthquake of June, 1348, Christine had learned that it would occur, that whole towns would go down, and that where the pope lived many would die. Of this she complained to the Lord and she learned that the souls of men would not be hurt much and that he would do it for the frightening of Christendom.⁶²

In the struggle between King Louis and the Pope, she stood on the papal side and said so. When in 1347, Karl IV was chosen with papal favor, she sent word to the King of her revelations concerning him, namely, "I [the Lord] will give the king three gifts, the choice of the princes, the favor of the pope, and victory"⁶³—not very remarkable since he already had the first two. In 1350, King Karl came to the convent. He was accompanied by a bishop, three dukes, and many counts. They all knelt before her and begged for a drink and a blessing. All of this added greatly to Christine's prestige. She learned in a dream that the greatest faithfulness on earth according to God was in the people who in all Christian lands have the greatest love and are "examples to Christendom," in that "they honor Me and are a joy in Heaven."⁶⁴

On November 9, 1351, there came a secular priest to the convent. His name was Heinrich and he was a friend of our Lord and of all good people. Margaret Ebner had died in June of this same year. Christine was interested in Tauler of whom Hein-

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 35.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

rich could tell her much.⁶⁵ He also told her that he and his mother had gone to Ulm. (Suso was in the Dominican convent there.) From Ulm, they had returned to Nördlingen, the place of their home. There his mother had died. This record made by Christine Ebner is the last known reference to Heinrich von Nördlingen. His biography thus rests on his letters to Margaret Ebner, his beloved friend in God, and references in the writings of other friends. His "calling" seems to have been primarily in the building of the fellowship of God's friends through devoted personal service and encouraging their growth in spiritual living. He longed for the fruits of the spirit, "the morning gifts of your Bridegroom Jesus Christ." He may well be finally characterized by his own words in an early letter to Margaret,

The fear of God moves me and causes me despair when I, blind one, would show the way to one progressing, when I, stammerer, would preach to one who can praise and speak truth, in short when I would teach one whom God himself has taught and to whom He in the future will teach more of his hidden wonders.⁶⁶

The "friends of God in fellowship" are of special interest in that they were a group of ordinary persons largely of lay membership (we have few names, yet evidence of many interested members) who endeavored to live the best that was known in religious life and activities. Further interest in the group lies in that they did not organize into a sect, that they seemed effectively to cross the barrier between the religious and pious lay folk, and that the idea which seemed to stand them on their feet and to help them endure the miseries of the time (whether we accept their way or not) was that God sought them as friends and would direct their personal growth toward perfection. The first step of the beginning Christian was withdrawal from things to the integration of the self, and with growth of this self the arrival at a stage where in having God or being possessed of God, they had all things, and loved all creatures, even their enemies. It was a way of salvation from the terrible times in which they lived.

⁶⁵ Her visions concerning Tauler have been told above in chap. iv.

⁶⁶ David-Windstosser, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

CHAPTER VI

"THE GREAT FRIEND OF GOD OF THE OBERLAND" AND RULMAN MERSWIN, MERCHANT

Who was "the great Friend of God of the Oberland?" His identity remained unknown in the fourteenth century and later. His writings, known as the *Gottesfreund-Literatur*, were found after the death of his friend, Rulman Merswin, in a sealed chest with the latter's writings. According to these, "the great friend of God" had chosen to conceal his identity. In his day he was best known as "Rulman Merswin's secret friend" and as the great mysterious and truly religious person living with comrades in a secret place in the Upper Alps. Traditionally, he became one to whom "the spirits (*Geister*) of men were subject as only to a pope; he was the invisible pope of an invisible church."¹ From his writings we learn his biography. Whenever any one did find him, he answered requests for help only on condition that his abode be kept secret.

It is certain that this Friend of God was a *lay man*. In an autobiography contained in *The Book of Two Fifteen-Year-Old Boys*,² which he had sent to Rulman Merswin of Strassburg, he tells that he was the only son of a rich merchant in a large commercial city. When he reached manhood in 1337, friends advised him "to fight and know women." He led a worldly life until his parents' death. Six years later, on the eve of the celebration of his betrothal, as he was kneeling before the crucifix in his room, he had a sudden change of mind (*Sinneänderung*). So he broke his betrothal with the young Margaretha.

Then he joined a group of *Gottesfreunde*. About 1349 he met

¹ Hagenbach, *Kirchengeschichte* II, 496.

² "Von den zwei fünfzehnjährigen Knaben," in C. Schmidt, *Nicholas von Basel*, pp. 79-101.

Rulman Merswin, who belonged to a distinguished family of Strassburg merchants, who throughout the fourteenth century held civil and ecclesiastical positions. At this time Merswin was about forty years old. Two years before this, Rulman Merswin, renowned and wealthy merchant, had had a tremendous spiritual experience. Because of the experience, he had, with the consent of his wife, Gertrude von Biethenheim (his second wife, and there were no children) renounced the world in order to devote his wealth, time, and strength to showing Christians the best way of life and to warning them of God's wrath which was bound to come upon them. The "terror of nature" was at its height in the Rhine valley during these middle decades of the fourteenth century; the Black Death, especially, was raging, and thousands were dying. It was a loathsome disease. One can detect in Merswin's account of his conversion the compulsion to think about man's condition, and to find a remedy.³ Perhaps devoted Christians could persuade their fellow Christians to improve their ways of living, and thus the expression of God's wrath might be averted. It was natural for the great merchant to seek for his confessor the greatest preacher in Strassburg, who was John Tauler. Merswin explained in the story of his conversion, *Of the Four Beginning Years*, that Tauler forbade him the extreme ascetic practices which he dearly loved and that Tauler demanded complete obedience to him as his confessor. Thus we are not surprised that when "the great friend of God" came to Strassburg, Merswin chose him to be his spiritual guide "in God's very stead." Nothing further is said of Tauler.

At this time the great *Gottesfreund* is supposed to have heard Tauler preach. In a book called *Das Meister-Buch*,⁴ which appeared after Tauler's death in 1361, the master's name was not given. The book related that in 1346 a layman who was *der liebe Gottesfreund im Oberlant*, Rulman Merswin's *Geselle* (comrade) had

³ Strauch, Philip, *Merswin's Vier anfangende Jahre*.

⁴ "Das Meister-Buch" (1369) in Schmidt, C., *Nicholas von Basel, Bericht von der Bekehrung Taulers*. See also above chap. iv. Tauler was not "the Master" though for more than four hundred years, he was thought to be and this *Book of the Master* was used as basis for Tauler's biography.

traveled thirty miles to hear the great "Master" preach. He heard five sermons; then he confessed to the Master and requested that he preach concerning the way to attain the very highest perfection in life. This the Master did in three sermons which the layman wrote down for use in meditation. The layman later visited the master and convinced him that what he preached he did not exemplify in his life for he was too bound to the letter of the Scriptures; that he really was a Pharisee who ought not to preach until after further study. The Master quite humbly agreed and submitted himself to the layman's instruction. In the book is a copy of the alphabet which the layman composed for the Master's study.⁶ The Master practiced the ascetic life for two years and endured great inner suffering as well as ridicule. At the end of two years, the Master began preaching to the people but broke down and sobbed aloud. The people did much talking about this. But later he preached in untheological terms on the text, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh. Go ye out to meet him." His hearers were entranced. "When the sermon was over, fully forty persons lay on the floor incapable of movement." And for nine years thereafter, the Master lived a new life. Then he became ill, sent for the Friend of God and gave him permission to tell the story of his life but not in the city where he lived. The Master died. The great layman fled the town lest he be questioned.

It is said that about 1349 (when the Black Death was at its height) the Friend of God of the Oberland began to write in order to warn Christians, and to admonish them. He wrote of "the spiritual ladder" and "the spiritual stairway"; he sent a letter of warning to Christendom; he told stories of chaste nuns and of

⁶ "Dis ist ein guot a b c," in Wackernagel, *Altdeutsche Predigten und Gebete*, p. 607.

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------|---|
| A | <i>Anfang</i> | A right holy life and its beginnings. |
| B | <i>Boeses</i> | Badness avoid and goodness substitute. |
| C | <i>Cimelich</i> | Carefully is the middle way kept. |
| D | <i>Demuot</i> | Due modesty within and without in all things. |
| E | <i>Eigenwillen</i> | Eliminate at once selfishness. |

Und so weiter. The present writer is responsible for all translations in this chapter from the original German dialect.

others. He gave detailed advice to the Brothers of St. John of the Grünenworth monastery in Strassburg. He wrote letters, nine of which were to the Master General, Heinrich von Wolfach of the Order of St. John. He autographed the *Book of Five Men* which was the account, written on the request of the Brothers of St. John of Grünenworth, of the life of himself and comrades in the mountains.⁶

Between 1365-1374 the great Friend of God went with companions to a high mountain; no one but Rulman Merswin knew the location. By this time he had tremendous influence with friends and followers in Hungary, Bohemia, and in Italy, not only among Christians but among Jews and the heathen as well. His companions (besides the cook, and Ruprecht, the messenger) were: the knight, his boyhood friend; another knight who upon the death of wife and children had sold his property giving some to the poor, and the rest he had brought with him; a converted Jew whose name had been Abraham but who was now called John; and a jurist, former canon of the cathedral who was "of somewhat superior manner and inclined to temper." Rupert brought messages and also the writings to Merswin to be edited and kept secret until after the author's death.

In 1377 the Friend of God of the Oberland went with a companion to Rome for an audience with Pope Gregory XI. He sought to influence the Pope as Catherine of Siena was successfully doing, and as the holy St. Brigitta had done.⁷ In 1378 the great Friend of God with his comrades considered making themselves

⁶ Strauch, P., *Des Gottesfreundes Fünfmännerbuch*. In the same edition Nr. 23 "Altdutsche Textbibliothek" is Merswin's *Vier anfangende Jahre*.

⁷ St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) devoted herself to ending "the Babylonian captivity." She addressed the Pope as "sweetest Babbo mine . . . up then father and no more negligence." On January 17, 1377, Gregory entered Rome probably as the result of her persistence. See Scudder, Vida, *S. Catherine of Siena as Seen in Her Letters* (London, 1906). See also Gardner, Edmund G., *Saint Catherine of Siena*. St. Brigitta (1302-1373) of Sweden was of royal family. She founded an order of women, an auxiliary one of men; visited Rome and admonished the Pope. "Her description of purgatory caused even the holiest among the faithful to tremble." Pourrat, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

known in order to go "to the five corners of the earth" to warn Christians to live better lives. Another trip to Rome was planned. In 1380, a most wonderful letter had been let down from heaven to thirteen of God's friends. It had been read in various languages and then returned in the form of a flame to heaven. "The great destruction" was postponed by God three years because of the prayers of God's friends.⁸

Let us return to his friend, Rulman Merswin, the Strassburg merchant, concerning whom we have authentic dates. In 1367, after the great Friend of God had retired to the secret place in the Upper Alps with his comrades, Merswin bought some monastery ruins on the island of Grünenworth in the Ill river, Strassburg. He rebuilt the monastery and church, and dedicated the place as a retreat for pious persons either of the clergy or of the laity. Any one could come who had enough money to help keep up repairs. Merswin lived there. A kinsman, Johannes Merswin, who was both a bishop and a count, was the first custodian. Another friend, the knight Heintzman Wetzell, carried some responsibility. Nicholas von Löwen then about thirty years old became Merswin's trusted secretary. In 1371 Merswin gave the monastery to the Order of St. John. Augustinians, Cistercians, and Dominicans had in vain asked for it. Nicholas, the secretary, became one of the brothers. The autographed *Book of Five Men* was supposed to have been written by the great unknown Friend of God upon the request of these Grünenworth brothers. It had been written in five days. The author suggested that if it were not clear, it should be translated by Nicholas into the Elsass dialect. This book was not to be kept secret. The great Friend of God wrote: "You can see, dear brothers, what unreasonable persons are living in these terrible days and yet they appear as good holy persons; so protect yourselves from the world." He also advised them to go out into the world but seldom; they were to obey their superiors in the Order. "I know your Comthur, Merswin, in the simplest

⁸ A similar letter had appeared in Strassburg 1347 or 1348, at the time of the "scourgers." A letter supposed to have been "written by God himself and let down at Magdeburg," 1783, was reprinted in Harrisburg, Pa., by Lutz and Schaffer, n.d.

holy meaning of the word. . . . And dear brothers, I advise you that you keep yourselves free from being associated with the names of women, no matter how holy they are. [There were many nuns and Beguines in Strassburg.] You must protect yourselves from their 'intimacies.'" The brothers are also to learn to live temperately in all things with each other and to thank God for protecting them from the present times, terrible both in the religious and worldly realms. They should ask the help of God and His friends. They were living in a cheerful place (*herberge*) and had enough to eat and drink. "Whoever among you is not thankful has not the love of God in him; he should come to live with me and my comrades, who find themselves as one heart in our love to God, and we accept all trials with untroubled hearts."⁹

In 1380 Merswin retired from the monastery to a small house nearby because of a desire to live more as an ascetic than was possible in the larger company. In the two years before his death he must have busied himself with writing. After his death, the brothers of St. John's Order found the story of his conversion, "written in obedience to God and his secret *Gesellen, dez lieben friunt gottes im Oberlant*," in a small locked chest with a silver seal. This book and others were copied and translated into Latin by the brothers. They made three collections of the writings of their founder, Merswin, and of his secret friend. These collections became known as: 1) *The Great Memorial* which in 1385 the Master General ordered should not leave Grünenworth. This contained Merswin's best writing, *The Book of the Nine Rocks*. 2) "The Latin Memorial" contained the history of the founding of Grünenworth and tracts of both men. 3) Out of *The Great Memorial* Nicholas von Löwen made a collection known as "the small Memorial," copies of which were to be sent out from the house for use by the pious laity.¹⁰

Nicholaus von Löwen recorded that before his master died

⁹ *Des Gottesfreundes Fünfmännerbuch*, op. cit., p. 75-76.

¹⁰ *The Great Memorial* formerly in Strassburg Landesbibliothek was destroyed 1871 by fire. Four or five copies of "The Small Memorial" are available; two are in the Strassburg Bibliothek. Strauch, P., *Sieben bisher unveröffentliche Traktate und Lektionen*, No. 22. Preface.

he and the brothers begged Merswin to tell them where to find the great Friend of God. His replies were evasive—that the Friend of God had died, or that the messenger Rupert had died and no messages had come recently. Four times the brothers sent out searching parties. In 1389 Nicholas von Löwen sent a letter of inquiry concerning the identity of the great unknown Friend to Johannes von Bolsenheim, prior in Engelthal. The Master General of the Order, Heinrich von Wolfach, to whom nine of the great unknown one's letters were addressed (there is no record of his having seen the original), sent out searching parties in the neighborhood of Freiburg, Germany. Search was made more often in Switzerland because of certain descriptions in the writings.

It is recorded¹¹ that Sister Margarete von Kentzingen, at a time of great trouble of mind with decisions to make, decided to go *zue dem grossen frund Gottes* who lived in the mountains. With great effort and with the help of God she found him. He urged her to enter the convent of Dominican nuns at Unterlinden near Colmar because there had been a spiritual reformation in that convent. It is a fact recorded elsewhere that in 1397 the convent in Unterlinden inaugurated the severest discipline of the Order. This visit of Sister Margarete von Kentzingen would according to all calculations make "the friend of God of the Oberlant" remarkably old.

Before considering further the identity of the great unknown Friend of God of the Oberland, brief summaries or descriptions of his writings are included.¹² His autobiography in *The Book of the Two Fifteen-Year-Old Boys* and in *The Book of Five Men* and *The Book of the Master* has already been described.

¹¹ Lütolf, A., *Der Gottesfreund im Oberland*, in "Jahrbuch für schweiz. Geschichte," 1876. Also, Denifle, *Hist. Polit. Blätter*, Vol. LXXXV, pp. 28 ff.; See also Denifle, "Das Leben der Margaretha von Kenzingen; Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Gottesfreundes im Oberland" in *Zeit. für deutsches Alterthum*, Vol. XIX.

¹² The *Gottesfreund-Literatur* (writings of this unknown person) in addition to those listed in footnotes, 2, 4, 9, include:

(1) "The Story of the Imprisoned Knight" in Schmidt, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-186.

(2) "Concerning Two Recluses, Ursula (1273-1346) and Adelheid," in Jundt, A., *Les Amis de Dieu in XIV. siècle* (Paris, 1879), pp. 363-392.

Story of the Imprisoned Knight

Under the direction of the "friend of God," a knight, after his marvelous delivery from prison, struggled for two years against his vices and thought at last he had won the victory. God's friend warned him against spiritual pride, and asked that he give him complete obedience, as if to God. The knight and his wife and daughters moved into a small house. He had built a chapel to the Holy Virgin and given the rest of his money to the Preaching Friars. The mice in the small house ran over his table when he ate and were so terrible that he was greatly tempted to be unfaithful. It took nine years to win complete victory over self.

Concerning Two Recluses, Ursula and Adelheid

This is the story of their lives sent to a friend in *langue romane* and also sent to Rulman Merswin, who copied it with his own hand on tablets of wax for the Brothers of St. John. "All those who

(3) "Concerning Two Bavarian Nuns, Margarete und Katharina (1302-1355)" written 1378, in Strauch, P., *Sieben bisher unveröffentlichte Traktate und Lektionen* (Halle, 1927).

(4) "The Spiritual Stairway," 1350, in Jundt, A., *Rulman Merswin*, pp. 119-136.

(5) "The Spiritual Ladder," 1357, in Jundt, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-146.

(6) "The Spark in the Soul," in Strauch, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-35.

(7) "Lesson to a Young Brother of the Order" in Strauch, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-41.

(8) "Concerning a Self-willed Worldly Person and a Hermit," 1338, in Strauch, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-60.

(9) "Revelation concerning Evils in Christendom," 1356, in Schmidt, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-201.

(10) "History of a Young World-Child Who Entered the Teutonic Order," Jundt, *R. Merswin*, pp. 147-152.

(11) "A Warning with Morning and Evening Prayers," in Schmidt, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-204.

(12) "The Seven Works of Mercy," in Strauch, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-92.

(13) "Book of Two Men," in Strauch, *op. cit.*, pp. 205-279.

(14) "Dialog between a Holy Brother and a Young Priest named Walther," 1347, in Strauch, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-84.

(15) "Useful Lesson for a Maiden, with a Prayer," in Strauch *op. cit.*, pp. 93-96. The full list of "The Great Memorial" is given in the preface of Strauch, *op. cit.*, p. ix.

find themselves in great and salutary practices of impure temptations, through which God exercises his dearest friends, will find here consolations and an example to follow.”¹⁸

Tract Concerning the Lives of Two Bavarian Nuns, Margaret and Katharine, 1378

Two nuns as close friends had entered the convent in 1315 when they were thirteen years old, and they were given “two fine new rooms” adjoining each other and “a door was made through the wall,” so that it was like one cell. They were favorites in the convent. Once just before Shrove Tuesday, they were talking about God and wondering how best to keep the fast. The one suggested whipping themselves; this they did with sharp iron whips until the blood ran. Then they dressed again and continued talking about the days before they entered the convent and of how natural love differed from the divine love. And they claimed for themselves the presence of their spouse (*Gesponsen und Gemahl*), and thus they remained sitting until Sunday, the first in Lent. At that time the prioress had the smith break the door of their room and there they sat in trance with two beautiful red rose-wreaths on their heads. They did not waken the nuns suddenly lest they die. The wreaths were taken and kept. Towards Sunday evening the nuns awakened, went to chapel and the refectory as usual.

On the following Sunday, the prioress led the two sisters to the room of relics where the two rose-wreaths had been placed and asked them to share the spiritual experiences which they had had. Their father confessor seeing them reluctant to speak advised them to share with him and he would put it into writing, so that after their deaths every one could learn what God had “worked” in them.

The whole convent was blessed by the presence of the two nuns, especially a widow who was told to take St. Elizabeth as the pattern for her life. The convent owned a book about St. Elizabeth.

¹⁸ Impure thoughts and excessive desires “of the flesh” as temptations allowed by God were frequently referred to in religious literature as tests of strength, and thus wholesome or good for a person who was on the way to perfection.

In 1355, after forty years of convent life, Margarete died and twenty-five days later Katharine became ill and died. They were buried together. The prioress asked the father confessor to write their life history which was to include an account of their communion with the Bridegroom of the Soul.

The Spiritual Stairway

Carl Schmidt summarized this tract as follows: "In a blooming garden the friend of God saw laity and priests having a good time. In the wall was a narrow door which led to steep steps. Many go to the door and turn back to their pleasures; only a few dare to go through. Some remain sitting on the steps. Only the very few climb to the very top."¹⁴

The Spiritual Ladder

The Holy Spirit teaches a man to mount from virtue to virtue. Two classes of men love God—those who love God through fear of hell and those who love Him for Himself. This tract closes with a description of diverse forms of the mystic life as expressed in the life of the Friend of God of the Oberland and his companions in their secret mountain retreat.

*The Spark in the Soul*¹⁵

The heading of this writing is "The little spark in the soul which the Holy Spirit after many great trials causes to grow in each God-loving person until at last it becomes a great ardent passionate fire of love."

A young brother sought a holy old father to ask why the reality of divine love in spite of all the talking in sermons and elsewhere was lacking to him and his colleagues.

Ah, my dear son, fifty years ago when I was yet a boy in the world there was a saying . . . the cats would like to eat fish but they do not wish to wade into the water for them. Just so are many goodhearted folk—they do not wish to exert themselves to learn about the supernatural divine love.

¹⁴ See *Zeitschrift für deutsches Alterthum*, Vol. XXIV, pp. 518 ff.

¹⁵ This summary is given somewhat fully because of the prevalence of the idea of "the spark" both in orthodox and heterodox writings.

But dear father, I do desire that you tell me how a person begins so that he will learn about this divine love.

It is difficult to learn, dear son, . . . few persons wish to humble themselves and trust themselves wholly to God. Dear son, do not be angry. The young man persisted. Ah dear son, you remind one of great and high matters which are inexpressible in that they belong to the Holy Spirit. Since I see your earnestness, come in three days and if I am told by the Holy Spirit to tell you, I shall do so gladly.

On the third day, the young man is told that the father is writing the answer, and on the next third day he will explain and give him the writing on condition that while the old man lives, the matter be kept secret.

On the third day (note the young man's persistence) the old father reads aloud what is written. There is a great emphasis on steady, slow, difficult growth in virtue and on denial of self and entering into the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ. The spark in his soul will be fanned by the Holy Spirit into a flame, and later into a fire and the person knows by his feelings of happiness and by the ease with which he practices the virtues that he is on the way. There will be a time of darkness. The spark will seem to have gone out, but quiet steady fearless waiting will bring the return of the spirit in even greater force, so that he cannot refrain from bursting into song.

There will come a time when in good conscience he can pray, My Lord and my God all hearts are known to you and you know well that I do not know what to do or ask next. My Lord Jesus Christ, teach me yourself or through your friends, one of your creatures, what I shall do and no matter how difficult, with your help I shall be obedient.

And thus the person grows in humility and virtue and obedience to God's will until the person is perfected and hidden in the wounded open heart of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now know, very dear son, that out of a created-as-animal person a God-seeing-loving-heavenly person can grow.¹⁶ And know

¹⁶ *Nâ wissest ouch, viel lieber sun, weler mensche hie in zit hie zâ kummet, do solt du wissende sin, das us eime tierlichen menschen ein got schauender minnender himelscher mensche wurt, und wissest ouch lieber*

that it is unbelievable that all creatures both temporal and eternal could not fully tell of the manifold great secret works which the Holy Spirit works in his friends.

Lesson to a Young Brother of the Order, 1345

The lesson given to a younger brother by an older brother of the Order teaches "a beginning person the ways to a good and perfect life." The younger brother who asked for instruction is at the close asked to translate the lesson from Latin into German and not to make known the author's name during his lifetime, and thus he would keep his solemn vow of obedience. The lesson can be loaned to a needy person be he priest or layman. It was written because "it is not good with quick words to speak or to teach; one should take time to consider."

The roots of vice, whether in a person by nature or through habit, must be uprooted and destroyed.

Do not be alarmed, beloved son, if you do not accomplish this at one time. But learn to conquer one vice after another and keep at it until you are quite free and all virtues flow into you so that your whole being becomes virtuous. Offer your own free will to God with a quiet heart, no matter what He chooses to do with you. God will come to your help and give you joy like a child's. But the time will come when this childlike joy will be taken from you, and the glorious blessed mature great gift of manifold trials will be given. Do not be frightened that God gives such to his friends most of all.

The Devil may appear to such a person as a beautiful angel, as a beautiful woman, or as a horrible monster. "Dear son, the ways are many in which God sends the devil to his friends but the devil can do naught to the friends of God without God's permission. Call instantly upon Jesus, or make at once the sign of the Cross and say, 'Welcome, my Lord and my God through the devil.' Ah, dear son, the ways of temptation are many and various, which God in his endless mercy gives each person among his friends."

sun, das der mensche abrerst rehte erlühitet wurt, und das ist geloube, züversiht und minne.—Strauch. Sieben bisher unveröffentlichte Traktate, p. 32.

Beloved son, I believe this, if you went to five great friends of God and asked each for advice as to how to improve your life in order to achieve perfection, I really believe that they all five would give you different advice, for each knows the way God led him. But know, dear son, the ways are many and yet all are one way, but this is not understood by a person who has not been illumined supernaturally.

Concerning a Self-Willed Worldly Wise Man and a Hermit, 1338

The self-willed worldly-wise man is advised by a like-minded friend to seek the advice of a secret *gottesfriunt* who is wise and enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit. On the first visit to the hermit, he speaks as reasonably as he knows how about his interest in bettering his life and attaining perfection. The hermit advises him to seek well-known priests versed in the Scriptures, for he himself knows only as much scripture as necessary. The worldly-wise man after careful thought returns to the hermit on the fourth day. The hermit agrees to instruct him, provided he keep everything secret. At the close of the instruction, however, the worldly wise man is given permission to write down what he has been taught and to share it with his friends, provided he keeps secret the hermit's experience. Otherwise, the hermit will go "to another land where he is not known."

The hermit then tells the self-willed man, "You are a man of many words, a worldly-wise, self-willed man and have companions like yourself. You use many words which you have not lived (*ir sint vil worte mittenander redende, das ir nie gelebetent*). Still it is better to be concerned than not; but you are not advancing. The surest way is to submit yourself to God and to His will." And if the hermit seems to be talking "wild and unknown matters," then in order to know you must make a beginning, change your ways and go often to school within yourself (*vil in dir selben zu schûlen gon und mûst in din selbes schûle demûtikliche und ernstliche den geworên schûle meister ane ruffen*). The Holy Spirit will become your schoolmaster. He will teach you the true way; then without doubt you will know peace and joy and light and be set in an earthly paradise. You will understand all words in one, in the only One, the Eternal

Word; in a short hour you will understand more than all the natural-wise masters could teach you in a hundred years.¹⁷

He who in this life trusts himself to God and His friends will know two heavens—the one in this life a foretaste of the one beyond. Such a person will know temptations and suffering, but one must struggle as a knight, willing to die a severe death without any question (*one alles warumb*) because of the love of his soul, heart, and will. It is necessary for Christianity to have such persons even if the community (*gemeinde der Christenheit*) of Christians does not know them.

*Dialogue of a Convent Brother with a Young Priest Named
Walther, 1347*

This tract consists of two parts. The first is a description of the young priest's vision "of a beautiful woman who bent down to him before the altar." The old brother, his confessor, said that the form might well have been that of "our dear Lady"; however, it might well be evil spirits under her form. He should supplant all vices with virtues, conquering the flesh through chastisement, pride through humility, avarice and disobedience through generosity and obedience, anger with gentleness. Every virtue should be practiced. This the young man did for a year and a half when another vision rendered him unconscious. The other brothers thought him dead, but the confessor thought otherwise. They put him to bed. By morning he could attend services. Later the confessor admonished him, saying that the greater the gift, the more foresight was needed to guard against evil spirits. The confessor gave him a little book of selections from the holy writings for his instruction and joy. (Note the method.) And the young man lived a good life seven years longer and died in the eighth.

Then follows "the little book" with quotations from St. Bernard, St. Augustine, St. Gregory, and Dionysius; and selections from the Song of Solomon, containing "you are my most beautiful and my dear friend without stain, the spouse of the eternal heavenly king."

¹⁷ *Und verre me verstonde mag werden denne in alle die sinnelichen natürlichen meistere, die in der zeit sint, in hundert joren geleren mohtent mit worten.*

WHO WAS THE GREAT FRIEND OF GOD OF THE OBERLAND?

Quetif and Echard who in 1719 published the writings of Dominicans (*scriptores ordinis praedicatorum*) suggested that the Friend of God of the Oberland was nobody at all, and that the story was an allegory. In 1826, the same was suggested by Weiss in an article on Tauler in *Biographie universelle*. Carl Schmidt studied with care the writings of *The Great Memorial* kept in Strassburg. He came to the conclusion that "the Master" was Tauler and "God's friend of the Oberland" was the layman, Nicholas van Basel.¹⁸ In his preface Schmidt corrected an idea of his earlier writings in which he had shown a relation between Waldensians and God's friends, and then in the text gave his reasons for identifying "the friend" with Nicholas of Basel. W. Preger in 1869 rejected this view. Denifle in 1870 refuted convincingly for many scholars the view that the person was Nicholas of Basel. At this time he was making a critical study of Tauler's conversion, supposedly told in *The Master Book*, and found that from 1361-1486 not a single old available manuscript identified "the Master" and Tauler, and that the association of Tauler's name appeared in 1486 for the first time in a manuscript which is now in the University Library of Leipzig. There had been a reference to it in an old Wolfenbüttler MS of 1436. Then by comparison of Tauler's sermons, as reported in *The Master Book* and Tauler's authentic sermons, Denifle concluded that they could not possibly be by the same person. There was also divergence in the dates. He concluded that the conversion story was fiction.

In 1875 C. Schmidt in new tracts¹⁹ took up the matter of Tauler's conversion and again concluded that "the great friend of God" was Nicholas of Basel. About this time Jundt²⁰ suggested that if the friend really had existed, might he not have been John of Chur? Or if he did not exist, could it be that Rul-

¹⁸ Schmidt, Carl, *Nicholas von Basel; Leben und ausgewählten Schriften*. There was a Nicholas of Basel "a free spirit" who with several companions was burned in 1395 in Vienna; See Vol. IV of *Die Religion im Geschichte und Gegenwart*.

¹⁹ Schmidt, C., *Nicholas von Basel; Bericht von der Bekehrung Taulers Strassburg* (1875).

²⁰ Jundt, A., *Les amis de Dieu in XIV. siècle*.

man Merswin had a double personality? Thus the controversy concerning the identity of the great unknown one continued into the twentieth century. Strauch in his article on Merswin in the *Protestant Realencyclopädie*²¹ concluded that Rulman Merswin had created "the great secret Friend of God of the Oberland." But Karl Rieder in 1905 advanced the theory that the Friend of the Oberland was created by Merswin's secretary, Nicholaus of Löwen.²² Strauch answered that Nicholaus von Löwen was from the Netherlands and that the writings were in Elsass dialect. An article in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (American) states that "Rulman Merswin through ignorance or fraud brought the whole group of German mystics into disrepute."²³

Be it ignorance or fraud, it seems evident, after reading in the original the writings of the great Friend of God of the Oberland and Merswin's known writings, that the author of both is one and the same Merswin. There may be a close connection between Merswin's reaction to Tauler as a confessor and the story of Tauler's conversion by a layman. The secrecy of the authorship and the whole idea may have been one on the part of Merswin, the founder of the Grünenworth house, as a way to control and instruct the younger members of the community. The ideas and visions are similar throughout; they show that the author was a good person but unlearned. The language in each is similar, and careful study by scholars revealed slight and not clever or consistent alterings in the dialects used. In some cases only the edited writings were kept; some writings of the great unknown were destroyed by Merswin himself for sake of secrecy. As one reads the stories, one is aware of the author's skill as a fiction writer. The writings also show a profound anxiety over the troubled times and a sincere yearning to be of service to God and man. The writings of the great Friend of God, though often crude and most monotonous, can be used as a basis for studying the mind of the laity of the fourteenth century with its distress over the divided Church, and the corrupt clergy; it also shows the independence of the individual

²¹ Article "Rulman Merswin," by Philip Strauch, *Realencyclopädie*, Vol. XVII.

²² Rieder, Karl, *Der Gottesfreund von Oberland*.

²³ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. VI, Article "Friends of God."

layman who would think and act honestly and to the best of his ability.

The story of Rulman Merswin's conversion as recorded in *Vier anfangende Jahre*,²⁴ which he autographed, was addressed to "all dear Christian persons." His first impulse to give up all trade and profits was simply to atone for his sins. After ten weeks of this simplified living, he was alone in the garden for meditation and prayer. He thought of the falseness of the miserable world and of the end toward which all was moving. He compared the misery with his God-given state and with God's suffering and bitter death for him a poor sinner. Suddenly a swift clear light surrounded him so that the garden seemed to go round and round, and he experienced "God knows what"—something beyond all sensible reason. He found himself weeping and felt great strength (*grose kraft*) and his heart was full of peace, and a love so divine that he hated the world and all that belonged thereto, even his own body.

In the first year he gladly gave himself to ascetic practices which his father confessor Tauler forbade. Sometimes he considered becoming a hermit.²⁵ In the second year after the great experience, he lost weight rapidly and became ill so that he could not make a pilgrimage to Rome. It would take big books to describe in full the manifold sufferings of these years.

In the fourth year God compelled him to write the story of his conversion. Now "when the great wedding" took place in his heart, his heart nigh burst with great supernatural peaceful comfort. He longed to go joyfully among the heathen to tell them of the Christian faith. And God gave him at this time "the secret friend" to whom he submitted himself "as in God's stead." Toward the close of the story he addresses, "O, dear friends of our Lord," and asks that they pray for him in great earnestness.

Reference should be made to his *Bannerbüchlein*²⁶ which is

²⁴ Merswin's *Vier anfangende Jahre*, see footnote 6 of this chapter.

²⁵ The Friends of God agreed that a disciplined life in the midst of people was preferable to that of a hermit's life. At least, it was God's way for them.

²⁶ Jundt, *op. cit.*, Appendix II. See also Jundt. *Histoire du pantheisme populaire au moyen âge*.

written particularly against the heresies of the free spirits who are under Lucifer's banner. The second part treats of the various forms under which mystic piety can manifest itself in different persons, and gives the means of attaining perfection.

It is Merswin's *Neun-Felsen Buch* (*The Book of Nine Rocks*) that Rufus Jones describes as "one of the greatest mystical apocalypses of the Middle Ages, and it may, I think, be called the greatest literary creation of the Friends of God."²⁷ The fact that Merswin expresses the possibility of the salvation of the Jews and of pious pagans through ways known only to the Holy Spirit, and that the writing expresses inner authority greater than the Scriptures and the Church make it worthy of consideration especially as the expression of a layman. The description of the growth of a Friend of God from strength to strength, through "the school of the Holy Spirit" up and up "to the Ninth Rock" and finally to a glimpse or more into his source (*ursprunge*)—all is of particular significance as coming from a layman of the fourteenth century.

The whole writing is concerned with "the right way to one's origin or source (*ursprunge*). We are first told how God compelled the author to write; then how holy visions (*fromede bilde*) were given to him; how the person was allowed to see the sins of Christendom which are described quite in detail; how the author was granted the vision of a frightfully, great high mountain of nine rocks; and finally how he wandered on each of the rocks, and was by God's grace taken from one to the next higher on up to the broad open level on the ninth rock, broad enough for all God's children but to which few come. One is straightway reminded of Dante's journeying.

The visions lasted only the length of an *ave maria*; sometimes the time of "half the service of the Mass." The story is told in dialogue form between "the person" and "the one answering" or "the answer" (*die entwurte*). Only at the beginning does the author refer to himself as "a poor smelly worm"; later he seems quite bold in offering to the heavenly one excuses for the persons on various rocks. From the beginning, he is burdened with the

²⁷ Jones, Rufus, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 267.

sins of the world, "really sick to death about them"; but he is sustained by remembering God's suffering and the work which God can accomplish through his friends.

The first vision is that of a great waterfall in high mountains; fish—multitudes of them keep falling down over the rocks from one level to another and at the very bottom are entangled in nets. Upon inquiry, he learns that the high mountain was created as the *ursprunc* or source of the fish to which they could again return home (*ebbe sie wider heim kument zu irme ursprunge*). He learns further that all is an allegory of the dreadful conditions on earth, especially among those called Christians.

Then in the story are stated the specific sins of priests and laity, of cardinals, of monks and nuns, of the mendicant orders, of teachers, of Beguines and Beghards, of princes and counts, of merchants, knights, and the working class, of farmers and tradesmen, of the women who are worse than men "with their clothes and all their airs" (*mit irme gewande und allen iren geberden*). The person is told that God is not a destroyer of nature; also that God loves some heathen and Jews in these times more than the so-called Christians, who do not live as Christians should. "You should know that when the soul leaves the body, it must judge itself. Some persons are so terrible that God does not wish his friends here on earth to pray for them."²⁸ No one must blame the other—the priest, not the layman, nor the laymen, the clergy."

The visions of the ascent of the nine rocks are given gradually. The person would become quite ill if he should see at once those illumined souls who live in "their source."

The vision of the Nine Rocks is:

At the base of the whole mountain is the valley over which a net is spread. Men seem to be trying to get out from under and up to the level of the first rock.

On the first rock are those who have the color of health; they

²⁸ Tauler in one sermon in which he was insisting on love for enemies seems to make an exception of "the sects": "*Nicht soll deine Liebe allein auf die gerichtet sein, die von deinem Stand oder von deiner Art sind . . . ausgenommen sind nur die Sekten, die Heiligen so sehr verwerfen.*"—Lehmann, op. cit. II, 118.

have confessed their sins. Some keep falling back. Sometimes one person drags two or three along back.

On the second rock are those who have resolved to give up their own wills and to submit to an illumined Friend of God who will guide them.

On the third rock are some who fall back at once; others who remain set up for themselves severe exercises in order to escape hell and attain heaven. On this rock the supreme temptation is stated. It is self-sufficiency.

On the fourth rock are those who mortify the flesh with the sole purpose of pleasing and glorifying God; but unfortunately they are still self-willed.

On the fifth rock are those who have really sacrificed their own will but have not attained to the final death of self-will.

On the sixth rock are those who have given their will entirely to God and to his friends and are steadfast; but these need recognition, either comfort from God or from other persons.

On the seventh rock are those completely obedient to God in all things and whatever He wills.

On the eighth rock are those really free from all desires of their own; they have good things as if they did not have them.

On the ninth rock, there is plenty of room but not many persons. But because of these few God allows Christendom to endure. These few are given at times glimpses into the *ursprunge* or source. These are troubled if God sends them sweet comforting. They are not perfected for they still think they have not imitated Christ perfectly. They do not ask to look into the Source, for they deem themselves unworthy. These people are unknown to the world, but they know the world. God grants to these on the ninth rock the fulfillment of their prayers. Some persons remain on this rock two or three years, some five, some ten years, some until their death.

When the person asks about the seeing into or glimpse of the source, the answer is "You should not ask; it is not for you to know, for it is a secret, hidden holy work," and "God knows well what belongs to each person, what is good and useful for him. At the close the person is given the glimpse into the Source. And

the person forgot time and space, and "when he came to himself" he was full of light and peace. He knew that he had been in the great distinguished school of the Holy Spirit. And for those "on the ninth rock," there is to be no purgatory, but only a step into eternal life. These persons have become nameless and "have become God." The person spoke: "Ah my loving heart's love, this sounds strange to me that you say a person becomes God." The one answering spoke: "Let this not surprise you; you should know that the persons who in this time attain God's gift of looking into the source, become through grace what God is naturally." The person spoke: "Ah, loving heart's love, I do wonder . . . that all persons are not hastening to become a part of this great worthy company." The answer—"This I will tell you, you should know that God has invited all persons but very few are chosen. God has chosen those who do His will. No one must hold God responsible, but only his own self-willed nature. . . . In these times the Christian community is not worthy of just, true Friends of God."

CHAPTER VII

ANONYMOUS LITERATURE OF THE FRIENDS OF GOD

The idea of losing one's life to find it is realized by the author of *A German Theology* (*Theologia Germanica*). The very title of his book is not his own. His thoughts in this one short book are simply and impersonally expressed; one reads along and forgets the author. On reflection one wonders about the teacher who could withdraw himself from his work and yet remain through the ages because of it a distinct and beloved presence. Numerous editions and translations followed the first edition published by Martin Luther in 1516. The writing is evidently a series of table-talks given to young monks. The author is generally believed to have lived in the second third of the fourteenth century in Frankfurt.

The reasons for anonymity in the Middle Ages were varied. The interest on the part of the learned lay in thought rather than in personalities. Then too, humility was one of the chief medieval virtues. And Dominicans had denied self in the service of God, the Church, and the people; or one might say, St. Francis and most of his followers were devoted to "Lady Poverty," and the Dominicans, to learning and to preaching. But in general, renunciation of self was the first step in the life of a beginning Christian. Writings like the *Gottesfreund-literatur* and *Schwester Katrei* were doubtless also anonymous because they asserted the superior wisdom of laity as over against the intellectual aristocrats. Such authors might hesitate to make themselves known. Again, copyists did not always bother about the identity of the authors. In the fourteenth century, anonymity did not lessen the value of the teaching, for men were beginning to think for themselves; thus authority was not as important as ideas.

In this chapter, after a brief account of *Theologia Germanica*,

or *Theologia Deutsch*, which far excels other anonymous writings of the period, two tracts *Concerning Three Questions* and *Concerning Three Kinds of Spiritual Dying* are summarized to illustrate prevalent trends in the thought-life of the times. *The Imitation of the Poverty of Christ*, or *The Book of Spiritual Poverty*, is also considered. It was long attributed to Tauler, as were some of the other anonymous writings reviewed in this chapter.

Theologia Deutsch

In contrast to the many enthusiastic editors of *Theologia Deutsch*, it is interesting to quote first one contrary judgment. John Calvin writing to the French congregation in Frankfurt in 1559 compared it to poison.¹ Two pastors were quarreling over the bringing of *Theologia Deutsch* to the attention of their congregation. Calvin wrote that he wished the author had never written it; "for though no specific errors are in them, yet they (more than one book was under dispute) are prattlings (*geschwätze*). . . . If you examine them carefully you will find hidden . . . deadly poison which if scattered would poison the Church." But the little book has persisted through the centuries as a gem of literature expressing German piety; it is probably what is called in modern terms, devotional literature.

"I would be to the Eternal Good what a man's hand is to himself."² Thus the author describes the will of "the enlightened person." He continues by explaining that the enlightened person

¹ Schwarz, Rudolf, *Johannes Calvin's Lebenswerk in seinen Briefen*. II, 257. Letter is headed *Warnung von Uneinigkeit und gefährlichen mystischen Schriften*. Castellio's Latin Trans. of *Theologia deutsch* of which 100 copies were printed in 1558 by Plantin of Antwerp, was put on the Roman Index in 1612, in 1618, and this Latin translation was left on Index, 1911 by Pius X.

² Pfeiffer, Franz, *Theologia deutsch* (4th ed. Gutersloh 1900). This edition has original and modern texts, 4th ed. pub. 1851, 1854, p. 35. See also Gottlob Siedel, *Theologia deutsch. Mit einer Einleitung über die Lehre von der Vergottung in der dominikanischen Mystik*, 1929. This translation follows Luther's edition of 1581. An excellent bibliography is found in David-Windstosser, Maria, *Étude sur la "Theologie germanique"* (Paris, 1911), with French translation based on editions of 1516 and 1518,

fears himself to be inadequate to this close relationship with God. Among other characteristics, the enlightened person "desires the blessedness of all people."³ In these three ideas one finds intimacy, humility, and love for fellowmen—all characteristic of the true Friends of God. Desiring the blessedness of all people is not equal necessarily to practical service. The author in his emphasis on the need for withdrawal seems to accept the outer world of affairs as inevitable. Now and then he is classed with the "quietistic" mystics. If one recalls that to this unknown writer, "One lover of God is dearer to Him than a hundred thousand hirelings; that to know oneself is acceptable to God above all man's knowledge of heaven and earth; and that there is no going-out so good but that a staying-in were better,"⁴ then the withdrawal from the realm of things to an inner ground is thoroughly consistent with the dominating desire for communion with the Eternal Good. To many religious persons as the Friends of God, the withdrawal to the inner self and the integration (*Sammlung*) of the self, expectantly awaiting God's presence and activity within the individual soul, were essentials to endure life and things as they were. However, the author of *Theologia Germanica* acknowledges more than once in the short writing that as long as one lives one must be in the world of things, and be disciplined by them but not overcome; that the world of law and order is real and essential—it is the best man knows and without it, he would be like the dogs and other animals. But, "an enlightened person keeps to the middle way." Creatures may be the way to God. God is good; all creatures are good even the devil in that he *is* (exists). Eternal blessedness lies in one thing alone, namely, in simplicity or oneness, in goodness or in becoming good. And this goodness which man can name we are told is not in this or in that good. It is All and above All. This simple one good need not come into the soul; it is already there. "Since the one Good is already in the soul, the *staying-in* is preferable to the *going-out*."⁵

The earliest known manuscript of *Theologia Germanica* (1497)

³ *Ibid.*, chap. x; also chap. liv, p. 233.

⁴ Pfeiffer, *Theologia deutsch*, C. 38, 39, 9.

⁵ *Theologia deutsch*, chaps. 26, 27, 38, 39, 50, 47, 9.

bears a short preface telling that "the almighty eternal God expressed Himself through a wise, intelligent, true, just man, his friend who was a priest and custodian in the Deutschenherren House at Frankfurt." In this Order of Teutonic Knights (founded in Jerusalem in 1118) were two groups of members; one group consisted of noblemen's sons who took the regular vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience; and the other priests who became the teachers in the order. The author belonged to the latter group.⁶

This author is usually classed with the Friends of God because of his ideas rather than because he used the term. His whole thought reflects Eckhart and Tauler. He distinguishes between Godhead and God; he treats of withdrawal from self and the natural world, of growth toward perfection, and of the birth of God in the likeness of His only Son in the "ground of the soul." He clearly distinguishes between a "*vergotteter Mensch*," i.e., a deified person and "a false light" or "a false free spirit." Jesus is the example through his humanity, especially his suffering. Concerning the times, he fears that "for each person possessed really by God's spirit, there are a hundred thousand or an innumerable number possessed by the devil."⁷ Not many authorities are quoted; Tauler is quoted once by name, also Boethius, and Dionysius. The Scriptures are mentioned now and then. The writing is directed to the individual and seems like a small clear mirror for the reflections of the inner self of an ordinary human being.

When Luther published the first edition in Wittenberg, 1516, he had only about one-third (chaps. vii-xxvi) of the present edition. He sent copies to his friends, George Spalatin in Altenburg and to Johann Lang in Erfurt. In the letter to Spalatin, Luther wrote,

May it please you to read this pure, solid like-the-old theology poured forth in German. You are able to compare this with the sermons of John Tauler of the Order of Preachers—the whole of whom as if in an epitome I send to you herewith, for I have

⁶ See Niedermeyer, A., *Die deutsche Ordenskunde in Frankfurt a. Main*; Dieffenbach, J. *Festschrift zum 600 jährigen Jubiläum der Deutschenordenskirche in Frankfurt a. M.*; Voigt, J., *Geschichte des Deutschritterordens*. 2 Vols. The monastery was in Sachsenhausen near Frankfurt.

⁷ Bernhart, Joseph, *Der Frankfurter; eine deutsche Theologie*, p. 126.

not seen in Latin or in our language a more wholesome and more-true-to-the-Gospel theology.⁸

Luther prefaced this edition with the following:

A really spiritual little book. Of true distinction and presentation of what the old and new man is, what Adam's and what God's child is, and how Adam shall die and Christ shall arise in us.⁹

Luther had a second complete edition published in 1518. Luther had added the title *Eyn deutsch Theologia*. At the same time, editions were printed in Leipzig and Augsburg. Many editions introduced the book with

Some important talks (*Hauptreden*) in which each industrious pupil of Christ can prove and know for himself what is to be studied concerning the true and basic Oneness of the one and highest Good.¹⁰

When in 1528 Peter Schöfer had it published, the printer announced,

Peter Schöfer wishes the reader true knowledge of God through Christ. This extraordinarily precious little book was sent to me by a servant of God so that I should have it newly printed to serve all Christians.¹⁰

In the sixteenth century, there were over twenty different German editions, and Belgian, Latin, and French translations. It is to be noted that "the young Reformation found in the little book what it needed: a vital, warm piety and theology not only for theology's sake but for piety's sake."¹¹ But this does not necessarily imply, as some writers¹² would establish, that the author was a forerunner of the Reformation, or even that he was a prime

⁸ De Wette, *Luther's Briefe* I, 46, chap. xxv, quoted Bernhart, *op. cit.*, p. 85. Written by Luther in Latin.

⁹ Bernhart, J., *op. cit.*, p. 84. Opinions differ as to whether the Leipzig or Augsburg edition first carried the title "*Theologia deutsch*," by which the writing is known.

¹⁰ See Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, Introduction, p. xiii.

¹¹ Bernhart, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

¹² Ullman, B., *Reformatoren vor der Reformation*. Pfeiffer (*op. cit.*, p. xxiii) believes his conclusions are wrong.

factor in the shaping of Luther's thought, though both men knew Paul and his teachings exceedingly well.

When Sebastian Castello, "the finely cultured humanist of the sixteenth century," translated this writing into Latin he described the author's style as follows:

It is like an orchard, indeed small, yet so planned that in it appears no oak, no linden, no plane-tree, or any other tree planted for pleasure rather than for use, so that it is filled entirely with every kind of fruit-bearing tree. . . . Thus this little book flatters the reader through no melting eloquence, nor through rouge or paint, nor enticing charms, or any kind of flowering language; it offers pure teaching which bears rich fruit, and excellently instructs the Christians.¹³

An interesting collection of old German writings was found by Professor Reuse of Wurzburg in 1843. The collection contained besides an *Ave Maria* in verse form and a very beautiful talk on the suffering of Christ Jesus, "a beautiful history of a preacher" who was supposed to be Tauler. In the collection was also "*Hie hebet sich an der Frankfurter*," which was *Theologia Germanica*. Franz Pfeiffer translated this newly found copy into modern German. He published the original and the translation on parallel pages. He found in the original German "a simplicity, clarity, vitality, and even grace" somewhat lost in the most careful translations.¹⁴ Pfeiffer published in 1854 his second edition with the wish that "this little book once more go out into the world to awaken many hearts."

In 1854 upon request Pfeiffer edited the English translation made by Susanna Winkworth. Charles Kingsley wrote the preface. The title was *Theologia Germanica: Which Setteth Forth Many Fair Lineaments of Divine Truth and Faith, Very Lofty and Lovely Things Touching a Perfect Life*.¹⁵

¹³ Quoted by Bernhart, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

¹⁴ Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, pp. xviii-xix.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Pref. xviii-xxiv. There was another English translation made by Mrs. Malcolm, daughter of the Archbishop of York and published in 1854. It was called *Old German Theology, a Hundred Years before the Reformation. With a Preface by Martin Luther*. Pfeiffer was annoyed that Mrs. Malcolm failed to use the oldest manuscript as published in his

Two thousand copies of the Winkworth edition were sold in two months. The varying titles and editor's notes have been quoted in order to indicate how this unknown person came to be well known and loved.

The one quotation made by the author from Tauler concerns "the many persons who too early take leave of pictures or images (*Bilder*); who leave the outer world of things before they have derived from them truth and distinction." Such persons wish to follow no one; they stand in their own ideas and "wish to fly before they have wings," even to heaven they would fly; Christ himself did not do this until forty days after his resurrection. Then the author adds succinctly, "no one can become perfect in a day."¹⁶

Next to the longest chapter in *Theologia Germanica* concerns the way to know "false light." It is clearly a protest against the Brothers of the Free Spirit, and is very similar to protests made by Tauler and Suso.

And as God and the true light are without all egoism, selfhood, selfseeking, so nature and natural false light possess the I, Mine, Me, and the like, so that in all things self and one's own are sought more than pure good (*das reine Gute*). . . . It deems itself God and yet is only nature. . . . It assumes attributes belonging to God as creature. . . . But where God is man and in a deified person, there is something different.¹⁷

Among the few illustrations in the book is one of "a false Free Spirit" who said "if he murdered ten persons, he would have as little conscience about it as if he had killed a dog." The author says that "the devil, false light, and nature are one" in self-deception. Such folk consider that best which is the most pleasant and comfortable to them. "Many a person knows what is right and wrong . . . but he does not love the right, he practices the wrong." The Free Spirits say that "Christ had no conscience." The author answers, "Neither has the devil; so he who is without con-

first edition, 1851, from the Preface of which she quoted. Susanna Winkworth's translation was published in London, 1854.

¹⁶ *Theologia deutsch*, chap. xiii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, chap. xl. *Aber wo Gott Mensch und im vergotteten Menschen ist, da ist es anders.* Bernhart, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

science must be Christ or the devil. . . . See, it is exaggerated shrewdness to think one has gone beyond the earthly life of Christ."¹⁸

God wills that Himself-in-man (*wo Gott als Gott Mensch ist*) be worked and practiced. Should it be idle? What use would it be then? It would be as good as if it were not, for that which is of no use is in vain and this both God and nature do not want. Well then! God wills this to be practiced; this cannot happen without creature. God and creature are necessary to each other. "Were it not for reason and will in the creature, God would remain unknown, unloved, unpraised, and unhonored."¹⁹

Man, the creature, has two spiritual eyes; with one he looks into eternity and with the other, into time. In Christ, the outer person and "left eye of the soul" stood with him, and so he remained untouched by all outer happenings. The soul must leave all creatures and above all itself. Many persons say this is impossible but Dionysius says it is possible. And another master speaking of what St. Dionysius said explained that it is an acquired habit.²⁰ If a person should turn within to God, if he should do it a thousand times a day, there would be a new true union. When the soul of man is prepared, God must work in man.

The union of the soul with God is interestingly described as "not a drawing up of the soul of man into nothing or into the Godhead, at least not in this temporal life. When the soul apprehends something of this perfect good, there is born a longing . . . to be united with the Father, the perfect only good. The greater the longing for union, the more is revealed; and the greater the revelation, the more the longing. The soul comes through the humanity of Christ, not so much through the outer events of the life as through the inner obedience of Christ. "He

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, chap. xl.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, chap. xxxi and li. See Bernhart, p. 184. *Wäre nicht Vernunft und Wille in den Kreaturen, Gott wäre und bliebe unbekannt und ungeliebt, ungelobt und ungeehrt, und alle Kreaturen wären nichts wert und taugen Gott zu gar nichts.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, chaps. vii, viii. *Wisset auch dass ein Meister . . . aussagt, es sei wohl möglich und könne gar dem Menschen so oft geschehen, dass er darein also gewöhnt werde bis er hineinschauet, sooft er will.*

who would follow Him, must take up the Cross, and the Cross is naught else but the life of Christ; for this is a bitter Cross for every nature (*für alle natur*)."²¹

With the other Friends of God, this teacher also was interested in growth toward perfection. The review of this one known writing of the unknown author may well be closed with his own words, *von drien graden, die den menschen führen und bringen zu rechter volkommenheit* (on the three grades which lead and bring man to true perfection):

Now one should know that no one can be enlightened if he is not first cleaned or purified and freed. Nor can anyone be united with God if he is not first enlightened. And so there are three ways. First, purification; second, enlightenment; third, union. Purification belongs to the beginning or atoning person, and takes place in repentance and sorrow for sin, with complete confession, with perfect penance. Enlightenment belongs to the advancing person and takes place in the forsaking of sin, in practicing virtue and good works, and in the willing suffering of all temptation and opposition. Union falls (*betrifft*) to the perfected person in three ways, in clarity and purity of heart, in divine love, and in the contemplation of God the Creator of all things.²²

Concerning Three Questions

When Denifle was establishing proof²³ that Tauler could not be the converted master of Merswin's *The Master-Book*, he published an old tract which shows by its content that it belonged to the time between Meister Eckhart (+ 1327) and 1352, when Merswin was writing. Denifle considered this tract the source of *The Master-Book* and *Of Three Revelations* by Merswin. For us it indicates also the persistence and prevalence of certain ideas of spiritual growth during the decades of the fourteenth century.

The three questions and answers are as follows:

The first question is, Which is the quickest breaking-through (*durchbruch*) that a person can make in time toward a perfected

²¹ *Ibid.*, chap. xix; chap. li.

²² *Ibid.*, chap. xiv; entire chapter translated by writer.

²³ Denifle, "Quellen und Forschungen" . . . Vol. XXXVI, pp. 137 ff.

life? The second question is, Which is the surest grade on which in time a person can stand? The third question is, Which is the closest union which a person in time (*in der zeit*) can make with God? Answers—A willing withdrawal (*abgang*) in spirit and nature is the quickest breaking-through. Patient calmness [perhaps *ein gelassene gelassenheit* should be translated “a resigned resignation”] in spirit and in nature is the surest grade. A reasonable breaking-through in spirit and in nature is the closest [or nearest] union with God. And also, that the person pattern himself according to the lovely pattern of Christ.—Of this “meister egghart” spoke . . . some persons receive God as He enlightens and pleases them; when this is withdrawn, they leave God—they take the appearance for being (*wesen*) . . .

God is being; spiritual sweetness is appearance; and they who they take the appearance for being (*wesen*), they are outer persons; they who take being for the appearance, they are “*innerliche*” persons.

The tract continues by asking, “What is resigned resignation?” A resigned resignation [which as indicated above might be more fairly translated patient calmness] in nature is that the person give himself to God in all his natural powers; and the same is done in the spirit (here Dionysius was quoted). What is a reasonable breaking through spirit and nature? In nature, as St. Augustine would say, all creatures are a way for us to God . . . and in spirit that the person lose all creatures and find himself “*ein einiges ein in dem einen*” (a one one in the one). This is a process as “meister egghart” said. Then six grades “which belong to all sensible persons who would attain the highest blessedness” are explained and no one in time goes beyond “a reasonable breaking through in spirit.” Lucifer tried it and failed. Mary sang of those who tried it and were put down from their seats. “Whoever wishes to arrive here, he must be as if he were not.” The questions as to whether this is possible and how one who wishes to attain this perfection should live from his youth up were also answered. “And there is no person in time so bad but that if he will God will bring him up as a perfect follower of Christ. Of this, St. Bernard spoke when he said God wishes persons as they are.” The tract closes with the prayer,

That we may come to this Oneness
May God who is Oneness help us. Amen.

*Concerning Three Kinds of Spiritual Dying*²⁴

Philip Strauch in writing of literature which preceded Merswin's *Book of the Nine Rocks*, published after careful study of many manuscripts a tract *Concerning Three Kinds of Spiritual Dying* in which nine groups of Friends of God are described without the mention of a rock. In this century when the Black Death raged, men thought much about death. It was natural for the teachers to distinguish various kinds of dying. Some like Suso described the agony of dying if one were not a true Christian. It is thought that the unknown author taught during the first part of the century.

The three kinds of spiritual dying are also called "virtuous deaths." "In the first we must die to sin; in the second, we die to our neighbor; in the third, we die with our dear Lord on the Cross."

In the beginning, the unknown author points out that "in the manifold troubles of our times there is nothing so frightful as bitter death, especially to worldly folk and also to some spiritual folk who do not seek the honor of God and the salvation of their souls above all things; to them nothing is more difficult than the thought of dying completely to themselves and living alone to our dear Lord." He quotes Augustine to the effect that there is no other way but dying from all things, that God may live in one. He early advises his listeners (or readers) to know that praiseworthy dying to sin has *gradus* or *staffel* and "can not happen in a short time." No one in time can be free from the assault of the "wicked enemy," not as long as "body and soul are together." It is to be known also that the soul must work with God, because divine grace and free will are related to each other as a knight

²⁴ Strauch, P. "Zur vorgeschichte von Merswin's Neun-Felsen," in *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philosophie*, Vol. XXXIV, p. 285 ff. Strauch calls attention to the possibility of an earlier heretical writing, "*de novem rupibus spiritualibus*"; see chap. i for Bishop John von Ochsenstein's accusation 1317 against Beghards and Beguines.

and a horse; grace rides; free will is ridden." The person who had given himself to God will be defended from the evil spirit. "God defends his dear friends; and the dearer the friend, the stronger the protection."

Possible conversations between the evil spirit and the soul are given. The evil spirit asks, "Do you not know that God is merciful? Do not listen to the hard preachers and confessors! Do you not know that you are of a weak nature and cannot do as others do? Or the evil spirit says to some, 'O man, you are living quite a holy life.' " Suitable answers are suggested. Some good people fearing ridicule and the like, say, "We are blood and flesh. We are in the world and need the world. We shall flee to God as soon as we recognize that we are sinners. We shall not be lost. God died for us."

And in this tract, nine groups of Friends of God are described in nine different grades or levels, each level of which indicates steady rising toward the perfected state of union which distinguishes the ninth group. Each group is instructed as to the next steps in the ongoing development.

And now I will write of the ninth grade of the perfect friends of God. They with great effort and with anxiety and necessity have arrived into such a joyful and blessed company, where their souls are as clear as the angels in heaven; they also have come through the temptations of the evil spirit with such tribulation that no one who has not had them can understand. These same persons are pure and submitted to God alone . . . they desire naught else but simply to follow in faith Christ Jesus, the mirror of all virtue . . . they are humble, considering themselves unworthy of all divine secret comforting gifts . . . whatever God wills, they will in their very soul (*grunt*) . . . they are pure instruments of God's will . . . the cross is to them more sweet than bitter . . . their cross is that they seem unable to follow Christ as they wish . . . they are humble comparing themselves to no one in time or eternity and they love all persons . . . they are dead to the things of this world but the world is well known to them. These persons desire no praise. They may be friendly to all folk and honor and serve them. They may be compared to a tree of great boughs filled with fruit and also giving shade. They die in three ways for the sake of their neighbors; first, be-

cause of the great foolishness of their neighbors and the world in not obeying the gracious God; second, because of the hostility of their neighbors to themselves; third, because they are crucified through their own lamentations and prayers on behalf of their neighbors. They desire to die for the sinners as David for Absalom. This is a sacrifice above all sacrifices which takes a soul out of the power of the wicked spirit and unites the soul with God again. It is a gift above all gifts to give one's life or be willing to give it for the salvation of men.

These same persons do not wish to look into their origin (*ursprung*); they have a great fear of doing so, for they are humble and reverent and understand well that such a gift is beyond human understanding. God opens their eyes and lets them see as much as they can endure seeing of their origin and the *groundless good* from which they have come.

The characteristics of this ninth grade "of perfect friends of God" are very similar to those of persons "on the ninth rock" in Merswin's book. At the very end, the author returns to the idea of corn dying in the ground in order to bear fruit, and says that thus a holy life brings forth fruit, giving God praise, joy in heaven, help to those in purgatory and comfort to oneself. The tract closes with

Through Jesus Christ who in eternal love through his bitter dying has freed us from the condemnation of eternal death. Amen.

*The Book of Spiritual Poverty*²⁵

There is an anonymous devotional primer, as it were, called *The Book of Spiritual Poverty* ascribed as late as 1854 to John Tauler. It is full of contradictions, exaggerations, and trite sayings with quotations from St. John [*re* friends], from Paul, Canticle of Canticles, Augustine, Bernard, and some "natural masters," as Seneca. A brief account here of its contents may serve to illustrate a none-too-good listener in his day, one who seems to have caught

²⁵ *Nachfolgung des armen Lebens Christi*, edited by Philip Jacob Spener, with marginal notes. (Frankfurt a.M., 1720). There is an introductory long Latin poem in praise of Tauler and his teachings. In the preface, the editor states that "this art in spiritual matters was not well known and could easily be misunderstood by many 'ignoranten.'" See also Denifle, *Das Buch von geistlicher Armut* (1877).

words and even ideas without personal experience of their meaning. Or it may be a student's or teacher's notebook which has through later enthusiastic editors survived the centuries. The ideas expressed are those common in *Gottesfreund* literature, not necessarily in the writings of the leaders. It is almost as if one could study in this writing how the thoughts of the leaders like Tauler are treasured by followers and lived by. Or this writing may be, as suggested above, a primer prepared by a priest or monk for his followers. However, all this is supposition except that the writing is anonymous. The following are translations of selected sentences:

Poverty is a likeness to God. What is God? He is first, a solitude from all creatures; second, a free power; third, pure activity.

Poverty clings to nothing and nothing clings to it. Some one says everything clings to something (*ichts*). A poor person clings to nothing beneath him, but only to God. A poor person may receive gifts and give away what he does not need. One gives away in order to be free to meditate. . . . Need is at times more useful than possession.

The author describes the soul who has withdrawn into itself as one who knows not what she was, what she is, or what she is not.

Yes, a soul can in time be so free from self that the world will not find anything of self in it; but God will always find some lack. . . . One cannot always stay within himself since he is made up of time and eternity in the one person. God condemns no one but *der Mensch verdammt sich selbst*.

Free Spirits who are proud as Lucifer and talk much are contrasted with really poor persons, who are known by their modest silence. Some folks scold nature and do not know that nature is quite noble (*gar edel*).

Concerning friendship, this author emphasizes giving: "Now giving back all things to God makes a man His friend. Friendship is union. As a natural master says, A friend is another I. Three things make a friend—first, a likeness for where God finds his likeness, He must love; second, the same desiring and willing. . . . Whoever would be God's friend must love what He does and

hate as He does. . . . God wants you to be holy; third, giving. Since the person is made up of time and eternity he must give things as well as himself. And a true friend of God suffers."

To follow Christ who is one with God, one must be united with Christ in his working (*Wercken*) according to his humanity. The truth is in Christ and not in visions. Bernard refers to those who would wander with Christ in heaven but are unwilling to endure pain on earth. He who enters into the suffering of Christ leaps, rather than walks, and stands still as some do in the Christian life.

The birth of God in us is like the birth of God in his Son and in all things. One goes through Christ's humanity into His divinity. He is the rule for all men, though some approach His works without him. The Eternal Father creates his Son with an in-birth and out-birth in the ground of the soul which is his inn (*herberge*). When the soul is lifted over all time and all complexity so that she is a pure spirit, she lives in eternity and is "oned with the One One" (paragraph 6).

In the second part of the book, the author tells how one shall arrive at a perfectly poor life. It is to be noted that these fourteenth century teachers were interested in methods of spiritual development. He teaches that a person must kill sin with virtue; one should leave creaturely things, conquer bodily pleasure by sinking self in the sufferings of Christ. One should "put his mouth to the wounds of our Lord and suck truth out of them. . . . He who flees the first bitterness, will always flee bitterness. . . . True reason dictates the leaving of creatures, a daily dying in order to receive. . . . Man needs certain outer things. Charity is more than contemplation. If a neighbor suffers, one must leave contemplation. . . . And they who stand untrammelled (*in der Ledigkeit*) walk truly with God and God with them. They receive God's kiss in the soul."²⁶

Other Gottesfreund-Literatur

There are fragments of sermons and of talks on various subjects, which can be included in Friend-of-God literature. Of the

²⁶ Paragraphs summarized are Part I: 133, 65, 96, 99, 100, 101, 107, 124, 127, 6; Part II: 19.

fragments, Wackernagel published two of the most interesting. They are known as sermons of "the Engelberger preacher."²⁷

From the *Sa* manuscript, I quote:

The third gift of God to a spiritual person is the lovely word of God. You need not say that you do not want to go after it. It will be brought to you more subtly (*subtliklicher*) and more lovably than to them who are in the town of Strassburg. It will be brought to you by the dear Friends of God . . . who leave themselves to the care of their dear lover, Christ. The more of God you find in a person, the more brotherly love should you have for him. If you knew a true Friend of God who was dying of hunger, you should give him your food to keep him alive even if you receive the martyr's reward.

In the other fragment *Sb*, a person is advised to submit to a Friend of God and live according to his teaching. One should give a hundred persons bread because there might be among them a good Friend of God. Some persons hate the Friends of God.

Some persons enter a monastery in order to imitate the life and sufferings of Christ. They serve God so that the little spark of the soul (*funkli der sele*) which came from the being of God (*wesen Gottes*) may again tend toward God. God is pleased with these persons as with His only begotten Son. It is often asked why Christ took the people into the desert. In the desert many right and good things have happened to the Friends of God.

Other anonymous writings concern "the twelve gifts of the Eucharist," and "the seven words of the Cross." There are also letters said to have been written by Tauler to Dominican sisters under his supervision. A prophecy of 1348 is credited to Tauler. In this prophecy St. Hildegard and St. John of the Apocalypse are quoted. In the closing paragraph Christians are urged "during the approaching terrible times, of which revelation has been given to the true Friends of God, to cling to God and at least to cling to Friends of God."

²⁷ *Alte deutsche Predigten und Gebete aus Hs.*, ed. by Wackernagel and Rieger (Basel). The Benedictine convent in Engelberg was founded 1254. The manuscripts *Sa* and *Sb* were taken to Sarnen in 1615. Eight different handwritings appear in the MS. *Sb*.

The Seven Words from the Cross

*Meditations on the Seven Words from the Cross*²⁸ is ascribed to Tauler by Surius in a Latin translation in 1548. The *Meditations* are *Gottesfreund* literature in general thought and also by direct reference to the elect (*auserwählte*) and to the Friends.

If to many Friends of God and to many who love Him, thy Son's Passion is as grievous as if they suffered it themselves just as if by inward pity they were crucified with thy Son, how terribly even unto death must thou [Mother Mary] have been inwardly crucified when thou didst not only ponder and search into the outer and inner pain of thy Son in thy devout heart, but sawest them with thy bodily eyes. . . . He [Christ] says to His friends and members, "He who touches you, touches the apple of mine eye!"

The teacher asks his listeners to "meditate and see how naked and helpless the Lord of Lords departed from this life. Christ died that God's enemies might be changed into children of adoption."

Some of the experiences are crude to the modern ears, such as the description of the relation of the soul and body of Christ, "which for thirty and three years rested so sweetly, peacefully, joyfully, and holily even as two lovers in one bed."

For the most part, this writing as well as other literature exchanged by the Friends of God interprets the death of Christ on the cross as the expression of perfect love of God for man or of Christ. When Jesus called "My God! My God! why hast thou forsaken me!" it was as if he said these words to his own divine nature, "for the Godhead of the Father and Son is all one."

Medulla Animæ and Institutiones de Frère Tauler

The *Medulla Animæ*²⁹ has a subtitle, "Perfection of Virtues." According to an editor of 1643, Christian Hoheburg of Lüneberg,

²⁸ *Meditations on the Seven Words of the Cross*. This brief review is based on the translation in Inge, *Light, Life and Love; Selections from the German Mystics of the Middle Ages* (London, 2d ed.).

²⁹ Published in same collection as *Nachfolgung*, etc., to which Philipp Jacob Spener wrote the preface, Frankfurt am Main, 1680. The *Medulla*

this writing is "more concerned with the ground of the soul than with outward appearances"; he also said that "Tauler is a practical author who looks more upon life than upon learning." The *Medulla* is described in the preface as "the kernel of all his (Tauler's) writings." This treatise was included in a publication in 1720 which was made in Frankfurt a. M. and Leipzig. It includes *The Book of Spiritual Poverty* described above, and *Letters of Tauler*; and there is an interesting preface to the whole collection which was written by Philip Jacob Spener in 1680. The *Institutions of Brother Tauler*³⁰ as published in French by J. A. C. Buchon in 1843 follows generally the thought and illustrations of the *Medulla*. Buchon describes Tauler as "the first of the German prose writers who composed his sermons with method and animated them with pure moral sentiment. He published what he called Tauler's *Institutions* and told that he had used a third edition of a translation edited in 1681 by a Dominican friar. All the selections "of Catholic philosophy" were made by Buchon "on the basis of philosophic doctrine rather than dogma, and only such as were universally accepted without any mixture of blame not only by the age in which it was written but through all the following ages." He explains in detail how the Catholic, the Protestant, as well as the non-believer, should profit by a study of the selections.

"All the teachings of Tauler in three points," are found in Chapter xxv of the *Medulla*. The first point begins with the statement that whoever would be a friend of God should love God and his neighbor as he loved himself. This is more true to Tauler's teaching than another recurring idea in *Gottesfreund* literature,

animae in edition trans. from Low German into High German is the same with slight variation as "Institutions" in Buchon, *Choix d'ouvrages mystiques*.

³⁰ Buchon, J. A. C., *Choix d'ouvrages mystiques* (Paris, 1843). "Société du pantheon litteraire." In making the selection of mystical writings which should be "a complete body of Catholic philosophy from the fourth to the seventeenth centuries," Buchon chose to place John Tauler in the company of St. Augustine, Boethius, St. Bernard, Gerson (as the author of *The Imitation of Christ*), Louis de Blois, and Cardinal Bona.

namely, that one should love a man of God more than others. The second point is that a person who wishes to attain the highest truth in time and eternity should inwardly free himself from all spiritual pleasure, for it happens that a person leaving the outer world sometimes sets up an inner pleasure-world and so hinders the true light. The third point is that a person who is truly free outwardly and inwardly and stands in his Nothing has a free way to the clear simple Good called God,—whom we call God in that He is creator. He himself is nameless, *bildlos* (formless), and free from all things.

The letters⁸¹ to Friends of God which are by some editors credited to Tauler seem to the writer to lack the rugged vigor of Tauler's phrases and forms of address as in the authentic sermons and the one brief authentic letter. They are more likely to have come from a leader like Rulman Merswin or Heinrich von Nördlingen. They have value for this study as indicative of the religious interests of persons of that time.

The letters are didactic for the most part, and are written by a person or persons familiar with *Gottesfreund* ideas. They tell how God works with His friends in secret ways, not recognized by every one. "There are sleeping persons who should *break through* on the counsel of a Friend of God." Both joyous and moody persons are described in the letters. The merciful God directs such a person to "enlightened Friend of God who has discrimination (*unterscheiden*)."

In these letters, "Knights of God" are mentioned. In some letters (chap. xli), the Friends of God are said to be associated with the heavenly host. In one letter (chap. xliv), they are addressed as, "O you Friends of God. O you crown and joy of our souls!" This does not sound like Tauler, but who knows just what kind of letters the much beloved and widely known Tauler might write. A man does not necessarily write letters in the manner in which he teaches and preaches. In one letter "the elect Friends of God (*auserwählte Freunde Gottes*)" are compared with "the ordinary good folk."

⁸¹ *Medulla animae*, *op. cit.*, chap. xxxix and following.

In one letter, it is written that "the Friends of God could easily cry blood, because the noble wounds of God are so completely forgotten on every hand. . . . And all that the Friends of God apprehend in this age is not God, but as Dionysius and Gregory have said, a dark cloud above all thought and understanding."³²

In another letter, God complains about His friends because they are too concerned with caring for their bodily needs. "The school of humble resignation in which the schoolmaster is the Holy Spirit and the only true schoolbook is our beloved Lord Jesus Christ Himself" is described.³³ The changing interest and emphasis on the function of God as Father, or God as Son, or of God as the Holy Spirit, in the lives of men furnish a study in itself. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries there was a gradual change from constant reference to the Holy Mother and her Son to the Holy Spirit and the school which He taught.

In the letters appears the relationship of a supervising priest or monk to young sisters. In one, the writer states that he would serve the Sisters as he could, for a true friend in God (not friend of God) cannot let another err. Even those in the first steps of the Christian life are not to be despised, and he adds, "If only we had many such [beginners] on the earth, it would be better for the holy Christendom."

The thought both in the *Medulla* and the *Institutiones* does resemble closely that of Tauler and of other Friends of God. The illustrations used are not particularly like those in Tauler's sermons. It is certain that the writings belong to *Gottesfreund* literature. More than that, the present writer cannot say without further study. Because of its length, it is difficult to make selections to show ideas similar to those held by the known Friends of God. One might consider:

There was a Friend of God to whom God had opened the Holy Scriptures. He called to God, "Lord, I do not want this or that, for everything is painful to me." After five years of temptation and need without any comfort, two angels came to him. Then he said, "O Lord, I desire no comfort; it is enough for me that

³² *Ibid.*, chaps. xlvii and xlviii.

³³ *Ibid.*, chap. xlviii.

I guard the place wherein you dwell in my soul so that nothing else enter." Then indescribable light surrounded him. And the Father said, "You are my son in whom I am well pleased." When this Friend of God has done all he can to atone for sin, he thinks no more of it. He says, "If I had lived forty years in sin and the time of dying came and I had confessed and turned to God with perfect love, I should be a spotless person. . . . Knowledge and love are good but union of the soul with God is better."⁸⁴

If God does not send you suffering, then it is not because of your piety but because He knows that you are still unworthy of being a Knight of Christ. And if you do not wish to be among the noble high born knights, then be a stable boy or fire stoker or kitchen maid. . . . The cook may become the pleasing queen, that is, a secret inner friend of the Oneness of overflowing grace. Be a good example. Keep moderation in your way of living (*halte in deinem wandel mass*).⁸⁵

The endless circle or circular movement as found in Eckhart, Tauler, Ruysbroeck, is also in this writing. Longing and understanding move in an endless circle in which God moves or participates; and the person is made over (*überformet*). Such a person attains the state of God's chosen ones. Such a one can say, "Within me, God; without me, God; round about me, God; I know nothing but God."⁸⁶

The psychology of the teaching is noteworthy; for instance, in the advice that, while most sins are to be fought, wicked thoughts are such that one should flee! The person who wishes to be a secret friend of God is told to be outwardly controlled without any exception. The author points out that many persons think they have a good will, when they really do not have it, "for they wish to teach God that He should do so and so for them." In dress, in bearing, in all their action, Friends of God are modest. The words of a Friend of God must be to the honor of God and to the peace of his listeners. It is desirable that a person become an unspotted mirror of the Divine Image.

⁸⁴ Buchon, pp. 613 ff.; paragraphs 16-18 in *Medulla*.

⁸⁵ Trans. from *Medulla*, chap. xi.

⁸⁶ *Medulla*, chap. xii.

The usefulness of the Friends of God is explained in chapter xxxvii in Buchon and chapter xxxvi in *Medulla animæ*. The idea of their usefulness is shown in the following quotation,

The true hidden Friends of God who hold up or uphold Christendom with their prayers have great sympathy with all sinning persons. They are prepared to go to death for them in order to bring them to God. And as grace compels them to pray, so they compel God to listen. "As grace compels these persons to do what God wills, so they force God to do what they will."

The idea of the Friends of God being hidden and unknown appears more strongly emphasized in the *Institutions* than in Tauler's sermons. They are only recognized by those like themselves. They are hidden as gold in the earth. They have no unusual ways about them (again emphasizing the temperate or middle way, the balanced life). "And this wisdom one learns not in the schools of Paris, but in the suffering of our Lord." And he who is so wise as to recognize these persons and associate with them and follow their counsel will receive from God that which he desires.

In considering the content of these fragments and anonymous tracts and in comparing them with the much read and treasured *Theologia Germanica*, one easily imagines (no doubt accurately) the far-flung area over which the ideas of the Rhenish mystics, Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso, held sway. The minds of the teachers in the troubled times were not paralyzed, and their hearts were not dumb. Though from various causes as will be indicated in a later chapter, their influence waned in the next century, there have been periods when their writings have been rediscovered, and times, when individuals and groups, even as these anonymous authors, found in them satisfying answers to life's paradoxes.

CHAPTER VIII

RUYSBROECK AND THE FRIENDS OF GOD

Jan Ruysbroeck "died on the second day of December, 1381, having written twelve books, seven epistles, two hymns, and a prayer."¹

"You will see only the convulsive flight of an eagle, dizzy, blind and wounded over snowy peaks," writes Maeterlinck and adds, "I believe that those who have not lived in close fellowship with Plato and the Neo-Platonists of Alexandria will not proceed far in reading Jan von Ruysbroeck's *The Adornment of Spiritual Marriage*."²

The German historian, Böhringer, calls this best-known book of Ruysbroeck, "the pearl of his writings, the most artistic (*kunstreichste*) mystical writing of German mysticism, a truly architectural edifice."³

There is a charming legend which, as Rufus Jones says, if it is not true ought to be so in the light of Ruysbroeck's teaching. The legend is that two students from Paris "who out of curious

¹ Ruysbroeck, Jan, *The Kingdom of the Lovers of God*, 1919, translated from the Latin of Lawrence Surius, by T. Arnold Hyde. Quotation from preface. See also Evelyn Underhill, *Ruysbroeck* (London, 1915). She lists eleven authentic books; Ruysbroeck did not give the titles, which are from early Flemish texts. The eleven are: 1) "The Spiritual Tabernacle"; 2) "The Twelve Points of Truth"; 3) "The Book of the Four Temptations"; 4) "The Book of the Kingdom of God's Lovers"; 5) "The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage"; 6) "The Mirror of Eternal Salvation or Book of the Blessed Sacrament"; 7) "The Seven Cloisters"; 8) "The Seven Degrees of the Ladder of Love"; 9) "The Book of the Sparkling Stone"; 10) "The Book of Supreme Truth"; 11) "The Twelve Beguines."

² Maeterlinck, *Ruysbroeck and the Mystics with Selections*. Authorized trans. by Jane Stoddart.

³ Quoted by A. Wautier D'Aygalliers in *Ruysbroeck, the Admirable*. Authorized translation by Fred Rothwell.

desires wished to be taught by him concerning spiritual matters" were leaving dissatisfied with their interview. The brothers of the monastery took them back to the prior (Ruysbroeck). He said, "I told them that they were as holy as they wished themselves to be."⁴

In these introductory quotations, men of differing nationality praise Ruysbroeck as an imaginative writer and practical mystic. This study must be limited to the relation of the Flemish mystic and his thought to his contemporaries—the Rhenish mystics, Tauler, Suso, and other Friends of God. Despite his location in a different region and *milieu*, Ruysbroeck is historically grouped with the Friends of God, primarily because in the same century under similar social conditions he developed the same religious ideas. He remained obedient to the Church, preached against "the free spirits," believed that because of "the spark" in the soul, man has a natural tendency toward God and that he may through humility and the working of God grow into the relationship of "a hidden son of God." Then too, Ruysbroeck and the Friends of God knew each other and so the question of mutual influence is of importance. Further, it is through Ruysbroeck's influence on Gerard Groote, the originator of the Brethren of the Common Life, that we shall trace⁵ the continuance in the fifteenth century of the practical ideas held by God's friends. The very name of this new group shows a distinct emphasis. Eckhart was presented at the beginning of this study as the dominating mountain peak rising above the high tableland where Tauler, Suso, and the other Friends of God appear. Ruysbroeck, though a contemporary and by no means so dominating as Eckhart, seems like a unique peak on this same highland of spiritual thinking and religious practice.

That which interested the present writer in Ruysbroeck was his personal demonstration of a balanced life. He taught it and he lived it. One is reminded of the tribute to Tauler that he

⁴ Meerbeeck, Jan van, *T'Cierat der geestelycken Bruyloft* (1624), In Introduction, chap. iii is "Het leven" von H. Jan Ruysbroeck. See also Jones, Rufus, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 309.

⁵ See chap. ix.

lived the truth which he taught. Ruysbroeck lived for almost forty years amidst city activities and noises and met with open hostility; yet during this time he lived a quiet life. When at the age of fifty he retired to thirty-eight years of a religious community life in the forest of Soignes near Brussels, he was busied with the building of the monastery, with administrative duties, with very careful writing of the eleven and more books, with teaching, and with many visitors. From his contemporaries, one gets the impression of an actual living out in practice of "the breathing in and the breathing out" of truth, or to express it otherwise, the ebb and flow between God and man and between man's inner and outer life—a combination of the contemplative and active life. In appearance according to old records he was frail, of charming personality, "with a serene joyful face," and of "humble benevolent speech."

Men who knew Ruysbroeck personally wrote his biography. Pomerius, Augustinian canon, kept the chronicles of the religious community, Groenendael in the forest; though his biography may be exaggerated in some respects, it is a very human document. Pomerius learned of the mystic's life from two disciples.⁶ Other valuable material was kept in records by Ruysbroeck's friend, Gerard Naghel, who was prior of the Carthusian monastery of Herines, near Groenendael.⁷ D'Aygalliers, whose *Ruysbroeck, the Admirable* was crowned by the *Académie française* in 1925, spent some time during his study in Holland, at the Abby Saint-Paul de Wisques, "a place in which Ruysbroeck is loved more than anywhere else in the world." He tells that

One evening, an aged monk, with emaciated face but impressively profound eyes, entered the cell, his arms laden with books. After laying down his burden, we began to talk . . . of Ruysbroeck naturally. Suddenly, with that energy which at times would seem to convert the monk into the soldier, the old Father, to whom we had set forth the main lines of our thesis, said "This

⁶ Pomerius, "*Vita*," printed in *Analecta Bollandiana*, IV, 257 ff.

⁷ E. Underhill states that this material is now the prologue to Vreese, W. L., *Bydragen tot de kennes von het Leven en de Wercken von Jan von Ruusbroec*.

work must be done well, or not at all." The imperative tone of his voice betrayed the monk's veneration for the blessed Ruysbroeck, and the dread of seeing profaned so ancient and touching a figure. . . .⁸

During "one of the wildest of centuries" (Maeterlinck's description) Jan von Ruysbroeck lived as a priest in Brussels. He was ordained in 1317 at the age of twenty-four and was given a place as chaplain in one of the prebends of St. Gudules' church. At the age of eleven he had come from the little country village of Ruusbroec,⁹ where he had been born of poor German parents. Biographers do not mention his father; his mother followed Ruysbroeck (as we shall call him) to Brussels and became a Beguine. The dialect spoken by his people was *Thiosis*, from which modern Flemish is derived. The boy appealed to a relative and priest of St. Gudules, Jan Hinckaert, who welcomed him, sent him for four years at least to Latin schools in Brussels, and kept him in his own household, which D'Aygalliers describes as "a laboratory of sanctity."

Jan Hinckaert and Franco de Coudenberg had formed "a small mystical association." They both were priests and canons. They had given liberally to the poor and lived together quite simply. Franco de Coudenberg had at one time great wealth and influence and had collected books. In the household of these two older men Jan grew up and received understanding of the sacred writings as well as of the active life of Hinckaert and de Coudenberg. And with them and the cook, Jean d'Affligheim, Jan von Ruysbroeck left Brussels in the spring of 1343 when he was about fifty years old. They retired to the old shooting lodge of Jean II which in 1304 had been given to a hermit on condition that after his death it be occupied by another religious person "in the service of God." It was called Groenendael or Green Valley and in the same forest of Soignes were three convents of Cistercian, Benedictine, and Dominican nuns. The four men

⁸ D'Aygalliers, *op. cit.*, Introduction pp. xlii-xliii.

⁹ "Ruusbroec" is the medieval spelling of the name. Other forms are common. A village was then "a conglomeration of poor huts grouped around a humble chapel."—D'Aygalliers, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

built a chapel with two altars; this was consecrated March, 1344. Soon others joined the community. On the tenth of March, 1349, Ruysbroeck became a monk. Eight others also became in the same month Augustinian monks. Ruysbroeck became the prior.

Since Cologne was the favorite center for students of the Low Countries, it is thought by some scholars that Ruysbroeck had been sent to Cologne and there had heard Meister Eckhart (+ 1327) whose teachings seem to be at the basis of much of Ruysbroeck's thinking. If he borrowed from Albertus Magnus, it was along the line of the science of nature. He uses knowledge of seasons and planets in his writings.¹⁰ His writings show familiarity with thoughts of Augustine, Dionysius the Areopagite, the Victorines, Bernard, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventura, and others. It is not for great learning, however, that he is distinguished and we have no records of his having been a student in Cologne or in Paris.

"It is traditional for biographers" D'Aygaliers points out, "to regard their heroes as God-taught and so they lift the writings of saints above all human criticism. We must not forget," he continues, "that the works of Ruysbroeck were early suspected of heresy."¹¹

Gerson (1363-1429), the Chancellor of the University of Paris, did accuse Ruysbroeck of pantheistic ideas. He wrote to Brother Bartholomeaus concerning *The Adornment of Spiritual Marriage*, as follows:

It has been said that the man who wrote this book (particularly the third book of the *Spiritual Marriage*) was illiterate and uneducated, and consequently an attempt has been made to regard it as inspired by the Holy Spirit, but the book gives evidence rather of human scholarship than of divine inspiration and the style is somewhat laboured. Besides, in order to deal with such a

¹⁰ Ruysbroeck, *The Kingdom of the Lovers of God*, chap. xxvii. A certain mystical application of the seven planets to the soul is made. See also, "Twelve Beguines" where Ruysbroeck presents the relation between the heavenly bodies and the destinies of men; for this Ruysbroeck is criticised by Bossuet in *Instructions sur les états d'oraison* (Versailles, 1817), pp. 56 ff.

¹¹ D'Aygaliers, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

subject, it is not sufficient to be pious, one must be a scholar.¹²

In regard to the sect of the Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit, Ruysbroeck expresses himself quite similarly to Tauler, Suso, and the author of *Theologia Germanica*. In Brussels there were Beghards, Beguines, Lollards, and Free Spirits. There had been violent attacks on the Jews in 1308 and 1315. There had been an artisans' revolt in 1306 which was most cruelly put down. The influence of Marguerite Porete, the Beguine put to death in 1310, pervaded the community. Ruysbroeck attacked the extremists by openly opposing a popular woman evangelist by name, Bloemardine.¹³ The public with whom Bloemardine was popular made up street songs in order to ridicule Ruysbroeck. *The Book of the Kingdom of God's Lovers* is a refutation of the false mystics, especially of Bloemardine and the supporters of the Free Spirits. In seven short chapters (vi-xii) Ruysbroeck describes the "six kinds of men who do not apply themselves to receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit." These men do not "accommodate themselves according to their powers, as natural decency demands, to the perception of supernatural and divine gifts." They are 1) men who live in open mortal sin; among these are those who suffer from the disease of avarice or greed, who usurp and claim for their own private use those things which God made for all men in common; 2) men, who are faithless or dishonest and pursue some error contrary to the Apostles Creed, the seven Sacraments, etc.; 3) false men and hypocrites who do good works

¹² Quoted from *Ibid.*, p. 67. To be found in the Latin in *Gersonii opera*. Ed. Dupin (Antwerp, 1706), I, 62. Also in Meerbeeck, *op. cit.*, chap. vii, headed "Har M. Jan Gerson Cancelier van Paris zyr leernighe nilt viel verstaende, die selve naermaels ghepresen heest." Meerbeeck also records the defense made by "Ruysbroeck discipulen Jan von Schoolhove" who had come to Groenendal in 1377 and died 1431. See D'Aygalliers, *op. cit.*, p. 132, for further details.

¹³ D'Aygalliers, *op. cit.*, chap. v. Records of the controversy are lost. The identity of the woman is also uncertain. Some critics identify her with the renowned Flemish poetess Hadewijch. Bloemardine had written *de spiritu libertatis* and extolled "seraphic love." According to tradition when she was teaching or writing, she sat on a silver seat, and so on. She died in 1336. She is sometimes called *die ketzerische Mystikerin*. See Herzog *Realencyclopädie*. 3d ed. III, 260.

simply for temporal gain; 4) perverse crafty and evilly cautious or wrongly clever who strive to possess earth and merit heaven; 5) slaves, devoid of liberty, base and unworthy of divine grace (the things which "render men slaves are the desire for personal profit and comfort," too great self-reliance as over against "that liberty in respect to which they are heirs of God"). "Of the sixth kind there are the naturally proud, and the subtle and clear-sighted by knowledge, either natural or acquired; they are frequently refined in life and outward manners, in natural contemplation lofty and easy, and ever devoted to their own will."

Concerning Ruysbroeck's relation to the Friends of God, the most persistent tradition is that Tauler was greatly influenced by him and that he had visited him at Groenendael. Pomerius, the biographer of Ruysbroeck, reports a visit by *Canclaer*, whom Surius in his life of the Flemish mystic records as *doctor sacrae paginae, ordinis praedicatorum magnae, reputationis et excellentiae*, and changes Pomerius' *Canclaer* to *Thaulerus*.¹⁴ D'Aygalliers, whose careful study can be trusted, sees considerable influence of Ruysbroeck in Tauler's sermons after 1350. We are fairly certain that Tauler was in Cologne about 1349. A visit to Groenendael would be a natural interest of Tauler. In one of his sermons he says,

I have been in lands where the people are virile and accomplish a true withdrawal (*Abkehr*) and remain therein so that the word of God brings forth more fruit there in one year than here in ten; miracles one can see in these delightful people, and great grace.¹⁵

This reference may be to Groenendael. Many ideas of St. Augustine and of St. Bernard were common heritage, for instance, the order of the seven gifts of the Spirit which is the same in Ruysbroeck's *The Adornment of Spiritual Marriage* and in Tauler's sermon *Repleti sunt omnes spiritu sanctu*. The content varies slightly. The language varies more. Tauler died in 1361. Ruysbroeck wrote mostly after 1350. The matter of influence between

¹⁴ Meerbeeck, *op. cit.*, Introd. xvii, 1624, gives the name as *Joannes Taulerus*.

¹⁵ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, I, 138.

the two remains an open question. We know, however, that Ruysbroeck sent a copy of *The Adornment of Spiritual Marriage* to the Friends of God in Strassburg about 1350 and that Rulman Merswin included quotations in one of his writings.¹⁶

Ruysbroeck, like the Friends of God, was very loyal to the Church. He speaks in the prologue to *The Book of Supreme Truth* of the need to

mourn for all such deceived men as think themselves to be kings in Israel; for they believe themselves to be lifted up above other good men into a lofty and God-seeing life. And yet they are proud and wittingly and willingly disobedient to God and the law and the Holy Church and every virtue.¹⁷

In the opening chapter of *The Kingdom of the Lovers of God*, Ruysbroeck states that

all have fallen from the highest place to the lowest, and are the enemies of God, of angels, and of all holy men. . . . Some men are strangers to God. . . . It is altogether pitiable and an immense unhappiness that they [the strangers] should not praise and worship God with all their ability; since they ever remain without knowledge of the delights which are the meat and drink of the friends of God bringing to them the sweetest inebriation. . . . God makes His friends to be happily foolish. . . . God desires not that His friends be affected by ignomy.¹⁸

Gerard Groote, the most famous follower of Ruysbroeck, relates that

Ruysbroeck was one day conversing with a hermit on the spiritual life. Just as they were separating, the hermit earnestly begged him to write down the questions about which they had been speaking in order that others like himself might be edified thereby. It was in answer to this request that Master Jan com-

¹⁶ Engelhardt, J. G., *Richard von St. Victor und J. Ruysbroeck* (Erlangen, 1838) Quotations used by Merswin are given. See also de Hornstein, *Jean Tauler, sa vie, ses écrits, sa doctrine*, in *Revue Thomiste* (1918), pp. 244 ff.

¹⁷ John of Ruysbroeck, *The Book of Supreme Truth*; translated by C. A. Wynschenck Dom. Introduction by Evelyn Underhill (Dutton, 1916). This edition contains also "The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage and The Sparkling Stone." Maeterlinck considers it impossible to quote from this book probably Ruysbroeck's "intellectual testament."

¹⁸ Hyde, *op. cit.*, pp. 5, 110, 89.

posed this book, which of itself alone contains sufficient instruction to lead man to the perfect life.¹⁹

And "this book" is *The Sparkling Stone*. In it Ruysbroeck explains three things through which a man becomes good; three through which he becomes inward; three through which he becomes *God-seeing*. He insists that "the first work which God works in all men in common consists in His calling and inviting them all without exception to union with Himself." In the prologue to the treatise, Ruysbroeck states that this "good, inward, and God-seeing man" is also "an outflowing man to all in common. Whenever these four things are together in a man, then his state is perfect; and through the increase of grace he shall continually grow and progress in all virtue, and in the knowledge of truth, before God and before all men."

After describing "five kinds of sinners, who have all been inwardly called to union with God," Ruysbroeck proceeds to distinguish 1) between hirelings and the faithful servants of God; 2) between the faithful servants and the secret friends of God; and 3) between the secret friends and the hidden sons of God. In the hidden sons of God, he says:

We find a more subtle and inward difference . . . and yet both these [friends and sons] alike by their inward exercise maintain themselves in the Presence of God. But the friends possess their inwardness as an attribute, for they choose the loving adherence to God as best and highest of all that they ever can and will reach; and that is why they cannot with themselves and their own activity penetrate to the imageless Nudity. For they have, as images and intermediaries between God and themselves their own being and their own activity. And though in their loving adherence they feel united with God, yet in this union they always feel a difference and an otherness between God and themselves. For the simple passing into the Bare and Wayless, they do not know and love; and therefore their highest inward life ever remains in Reason and in Ways. And so there is a great difference between the secret friends and the hidden sons of God. For the friends feel nought else but a loving and living ascent to God in some wise; but above this, the sons experience

¹⁹ Quoted from D'Aygaliers, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

a simple and death-like passing which is in no Wise. . . . Nevertheless you should know that all good and faithful men are the sons of God; for they are all born of the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God lives in them. . . . But because of the inequality of their adherence and their exercises, I call some the faithful servants of God, and others I call His secret friends and others again are His hidden sons.

Thus Ruysbroeck in common with the Friends of God emphasizes the spiritual growth of "an enlightened person" toward perfection. And he describes most specifically the state when

we transcend ourselves . . . when we cease and we and all our selfhood die in God. . . . In this idleness of our spirit, we receive the Incomprehensible Light, which enwraps us and penetrates us, as the air is penetrated by the light of the sun. . . . What we are, that we behold; and what we behold that we are; for our thought, our life, and our being are uplifted in simplicity, and made one with the Truth which is God.²⁰

In *The Sparkling Stone* there is also a reference to some foolish men who would be so inward that they would neither act nor serve, even in those things of which their neighbor has need. "Behold these are neither secret friends nor faithful servants of God." In another writing, Ruysbroeck taught that the enlightened bears in himself a love toward all. He shall go out toward God, all saints, all sinners, friends in purgatory, and towards himself and all good men.²¹

Ruysbroeck's writings have vitality and color and movement—perhaps imparted by the forest, where tradition tells us he would often go alone and there under a certain tree would write as the Holy Spirit dictated. He wrote both of "heavenly weal and hellish woe." He wrote of "rills of grace" and of "a torrent in which God gives to us and shows to us great wonders." In explaining *Raptus*, which he says means "rapt away," he speaks of "sudden spiritual glimpses which God grants . . . as lightning in the sky." He tells "the parable of the ant" and refers "to the eyes of a bat in the light of the sun."

²⁰ Wynschenck, Dom, tr., *The Sparkling Stone*, chaps. viii-ix.

²¹ *The Adornment of Spiritual Marriage*, Bk. II, chaps. xl, xli, xlii, xliii.

The heart swims in bliss as a fish in water; and the inward ground of the heart burns in the fury of love. . . . The heat is so unmeasured that the exercise of love between ourselves and God flashes to and fro like the lightning in the sky; and yet we cannot be consumed in its ardour.

We are reminded of the flowers in Suso's writing, by the following:

Purity of body is likened to the whiteness of lilies and to the cleanness of angels. In withstanding, it is likened to the redness of roses, to the nobleness of martyrs. If it is kept for the love and glory of God, it is perfect. And so it is likened to the sunflower, for it is one of the highest ornaments of nature.²²

In describing unity, Ruysbroeck explains what is meant by the integration or integrity of a person,

Unity is this: that a man feel himself to be gathered together with all his powers in the unity of his heart. Unity brings inward peace and restfulness of heart. Unity is a bond which draws together body and soul, heart and senses, and all outward and inward powers and encloses them in the union of love.²³

Ruysbroeck's idea of the nature of man can best be shown in his own words,

Man has a natural tendency towards God, because of the spark of the soul and because of the highest reason which always desires the good and hates the evil. . . . The eternal image is common to all men, in good and evil men alike. It is certainly the first cause of all holiness and blessedness. . . . By means of the enlightened reason the spirit lifts itself up in inward observation and it beholds and observes the most inward part of itself. . . . If a man does all he can and cannot do more because of his feebleness, it rests with the infinite Goodness of God to finish the work.²⁴

Among the ways suggested by Ruysbroeck for man to follow in preparation for "spiritual marriage," I have selected three which reflect the common religious heritage of the times: the first,

²² *Ibid.*, Bk. I, chap. xxii, quoted pp. 38-39.

²³ *Ibid.*, Bk. II, chap. ix.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Bk. I, chap. I.

the use of the Mass; another, the need for singleness of purpose or will in "the ground" of the soul, and third, the contrast of heaven and hell. They are as follows:

Go therefore to the Sacrament of the Altar, not for the sake of refreshment, nor because of desire, nor for pleasure, nor for peace, nor for satisfaction, nor for sweetness, nor for anything else than the glory of God and your own growth in all virtues.²⁵

A single intention is the end and beginning . . . it pierces and passes through itself and all the heavens and all things and finds God within the simple ground of its own being. That intention is single which aims only at God and in all things only at their connection with God.²⁶

So soon as man can do this [freely abandon his own will to the will of God] with untroubled heart, and with a free spirit, at that very moment, he recovers his health and brings heaven into hell and hell into heaven.²⁷

The presence of the birth of God in the individual is described:

Now the grace of God pouring forth from God is an inward thrust and urge of the Holy Spirit, driving forth our spirit from within and exciting it towards all virtues. This grace flows from within and not from without; for God is more inward to us than we are to ourselves, and His inward thrust or working within us, be it natural or supernatural, is nearer to us and more intimate to us than our own working is. And therefore God works in us from within outward; but all creatures work from without inwards.²⁸

Ruysbroeck expresses the idea of God's working in the "Eternal Now" just as Meister Eckhart did. And in the same third book of *The Adornment of Spiritual Marriage* (the one which Gerson criticised) Ruysbroeck writes of comprehending God above all similitudes just as He is in Himself. Further he describes a state of being God with God, without intermediary, and without any otherness that can become a hindrance or even an intermediary.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, chap. xxii, tr. Wynschenck Dom., p. 38.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, chap. lxii, p. 133.

²⁷ *The Book of Supreme Truth*, chap. vi, tr. Wynschenck Dom., p. 235.

²⁸ *Spiritual Marriage*, Bk. II, chap. iii. tr. Wynschenck Dom., p. 56.

For Ruysbroeck, the nature of the Godhead is (as it was with Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso) pure being, imageless, desert bareness. God is the ultimate Truth.

In the prologue to *The Adornment of Spiritual Marriage*, we learn that

the Bridegroom is Christ, and human nature is the bride; the which [human nature] God has made in His own image and after His likeness. . . . In the body of the Virgin Mary, there was He married to this bride, our nature. . . . The coming of Christ to us is from within outwards and we go towards Him from without inwards.²⁹

For the last direct quotation I come back to Ruysbroeck's teaching of the ebb and flow of life, which is doubtless the secret of "the balanced life,"

This flowing forth of God always demands a flowing back; for God is the Sea that ebbs and flows pouring without ceasing into all His beloved, according to the need and merits of each and ebbing back again with all those who have been endowed both in heaven and on earth with all that they have and all that they can.³⁰

According to Ruysbroeck,

man becomes a living and willing instrument with which God works . . . and thus man possesses a universal life, for he is ready alike for contemplation and for action and is perfect in both of them. And none can have this universal life save the God-seeing man.³¹

Ruysbroeck in more than one passage admits that there are few who in this life are "meet to be united with God without means . . . and to it none can attain through knowledge and subtlety, neither through any exercise whatever." He begs "every one who cannot understand this, or feel it in the fruitive unity of his spirit that he be not offended by it, and leave it for that which it is." The tempered certainty of the mystic, who bases his conviction on actual experience, shows itself in expressions

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Bk. II, chap. lvi.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Bk. II, chap. xl; tr. *ibid.*, p. 103.

³¹ *The Sparkling Stone*, chap. xiv; tr. *ibid.*, p. 221.

such as "For that which I am going to say is true, and Christ the Eternal Truth has said it Himself in His teaching."

Ruysbroeck's method was indicated above when he complied with the hermit's request to write out their conversation. Even more interesting is Gerard Groote's account concerning obscurities in the early writing, *The Kingdom of God's Lovers*. Groote relates:

I screwed up my courage and with a few of our brothers, we addressed Master Jan, praying him to enlighten us personally regarding certain profound passages we found in his books. . . . In his great goodness and notwithstanding the inconvenience it must have caused him, he walked the five leagues that separated us. . . . When I spoke to him myself of the passages that had proved a stumbling block . . . he answered with the utmost benevolence. He said that he did not know that this book had reached us and that the fact of the work being known was displeasing to him. It was his first book. . . . On hearing this, I proposed to return the book to him. He answered that he would write another book to explain the Kingdom and in it he would fully express himself and point out the doubtful words. This he did and it is the book beginning with the words, "The prophet Samuel . . ." ³²

Gerard Groote (1340-1384/5) visited Ruysbroeck at Groenendael in late 1374 or early 1375. He was met by the prior at the gate "who being divinely guided called him by name." Brother Gerard is one of the most interesting personalities of the time, for he founded what might be called "social service groups" organized for mutual support and edification and primarily service to unprivileged folk. Tradition tells that when as a young teacher, he was watching a public game in Cologne, "a stranger with a devout face, an unnamed Friend of God in simple garb, asked, 'Why standest thou here? Thou oughtest to become another man.'" And so he did, largely through his later devotion to Ruysbroeck. Between the Friends of God and the Brothers of the Common Life, Ruysbroeck was the link through Gerard Groote. Thus Ruysbroeck's constant effort to enlighten all persons espe-

³² Quotation from D'Aygaliers, *op. cit.*, p. 84. The book beginning with the words "the prophet Samuel" is "The Book of Supreme Truth."

cially beginners (for whom several of his books were written) will be seen to bear good fruit.

Ruysbroeck died in 1381 after two weeks of fever. Rumors of miracles connected with his passing and with his tomb spread among the people. Even the canons of St. Gudule of Brussels made a yearly pilgrimage, walking through the forest of Soignes to Groenendael. The old cook who had come with Ruysbroeck, Hinkaert, and de Coudenberg, died three years before Ruysbroeck. The cook was known as a man "illumined by God and illustrious in mystic writings." The old, old friend, Franco de Coudenberg, survived Ruysbroeck by five years; the monks then buried de Coudenberg and Ruysbroeck in a new chapel at Groenendael.

Between the years 1624-1634, the Congregation of Rites of Rome considered declaring Jan von Ruysbroeck as "Blessed." Pope Urban VIII decided that the evidence was inadequate. Between 1885 and 1909, the question was again considered with the outcome that "particular prayers may be instituted on behalf of the blessed saint." This distinction was given later to Suso also. Whether "blessed" or not, Jan von Ruysbroeck deserved the name more commonly given to him in his own day, "Ruysbroeck, the Admirable."

CHAPTER IX

LATER TRACES OF THE FRIENDS OF GOD

The Friends of God of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries cannot be known as readily as Meister Eckhart, the beloved Tauler, Suso wrestling with the problem of suffering, and Ruysbroeck, the Admirable. Nor are the interests and activities of the later groups of God's friends as clearly revealed in the chronicles and religious writings as those of the circles of Basel, the convents of Medingen, Cologne, and Strassburg in the preceding century. Ideal Friends of God both in heaven and earth appear in later writings but no one figure becomes so real and influential as "the great Friend of God of the Oberland" whose identity, it will be recalled, was sought by the nineteenth century scholars.

In 1409 (some writers give the date as 1397) Nicholas of Basel and several companions were burned in Vienna as heretics. Tradition associated him with God's friends. Carl Schmidt identified this Nicholas of Basel with "the great Friend of God of the Oberland" and published in 1866 the writings of the great friend. Nine years later in spite of scholarly refutation of the identification, Schmidt continued to assert the same.¹ The fifteenth century manuscripts show definitely that there were groups of God's friends in Thuringia (Eckhart's home province) and in Bohemia where Queen Agnes in the fourteenth century was interested in the Friends of God. When in 1393 Martin of Mainz was condemned, the document classed him with "those who have been and are *amici dei*."

The most illuminating reference to an individual called a Friend of God is of one described as living in Spain. St. Theresa (1515-1582) tells in her autobiography of "an ecclesiastic, servant of

¹ Schmidt, C., *Nicholas von Basel* (1866); also, his *Nicholas von Basel. Bericht von der Bekehrung Taulers*.

God and His great friend," whom she asked to become the director of her soul. This was before she had attained sainthood. In her own words,

He would not be my confessor; he said that he was very much occupied and so indeed he was. . . . He began with a holy resolution to direct me as if I was strong. When I saw that he was resolved to make me break off at once with the petty ways and that I had not the courage to go forth at once in the perfection he required of me, I was distressed. . . . I wonder at times how it was that he, being one who had a particular grace for the direction of beginners in the way of God, was not permitted to understand my case, or the care of my soul . . . [and so she turned to members of the Society of Jesus].²

In this "snapshot" of a Friend of God of the sixteenth century one can recognize a reflection of Tauler's sternness with the religious who were too self-conscious, or his impatience with "their running to the teachers"; and best of all, his patience with beginning Christians which is reflected in this sixteenth century ecclesiastic's "particular grace for the direction of beginners in the way of God." In her writings, St. Teresa says that even "the devil knows that the whole relief of the soul consists in conferring with the friends of God." She also knows Christ as her friend.

In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries the religious and lay scholars made compilations of the earlier writings in the vernacular. In the convents especially, these compilations became the textbooks. Research has shown that Rulman Merswin's writings contain whole sections of writings of others. On his part also this was very probably a matter of preparing material for instruction and devotional reading of the young monks. There are extant many collections of Tauler's sermons; some are marked "small Tauler" and others "the greater Tauler." Many collections were conglomerates rather than compilations centering around an idea. Among the writings in common use in the early fifteenth century in the Rhine valley were Othon von Passau's *Die Krone der Aeltesten*, and Mark von Lindau's exposition of the Ten

² *The Life of St. Teresa of Jesus*. Written by Herself. Tr. by Lewis (3d ed.). Chap. xxiii.

Commandments as found in *Der Bilder Catechismus der fünfzehnten Jahrhunderts*.³ There was also in the valley of the Danube a compilation made by the Abbot of the Cistercian Convent of Königgrätz in which Friends of God are mentioned.⁴ In the preface to his compilation, Othon von Passau explained that it was made at the request of one of his penitents and he addressed it "to all friends of God of the country." Othon was a lecturer for the Franciscans in Basel. The compilation consists of theological excerpts from one hundred and forty "doctors" and it is set in twenty-four lessons. These lessons are spoken by twenty-four "ancients" who surround the throne of God and wear the gold crowns described in the book of Revelations. The eighteenth ancient speaks of the benefits of God's friendship somewhat as follows . . . friendship of men is a great advantage but more so the friendship of God. He alone is a friend of God who wishes what God wishes and who is displeased with what displeases God. To become God's friend is the end for which man was created. In Mark Lindau's exposition of the Ten Commandments, God's friends and the Virgin Mary are cited as models in the keeping of the commandments.

How prevalent these references to Friends of God are in the compilations of the fifteenth century is not easy to determine. The research work of German scholars is far from completed. Some manuscripts were destroyed in the stormy period of the Protestant Reformation, or earlier by ecclesiastics who opposed even the reading of the Scriptures in the vernacular by the laity.

The Church continued to discipline heretics. When in 1384 Wyclif was summoned by the Pope from England to Rome he declined by saying, "God has taught me more obedience to God than to men." But John Hus, once dean of the faculty of philosophy in the University of Prague defended the writings of Wyclif and was burned as a heretic in 1415, by order of the Church Council of Constance which had just resolved "the great schism."

³ *Die Krone der Aeltesten* summarized in Jundt, *Les Amis de Dieu*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

Geffcken, Johannes, *Der Bilder Catechismus*.

⁴ *La Pomme de Grenade*. Not located by the writer.

The Inquisition seemed successful in controlling the heretical sects. One can well imagine that the spirits of "the giant people" were dulled religiously. Their restlessness seemed to have subsided. But, one hundred years after the burning of Hus, the general revolt known as the Protestant Reformation took place. By it certain ecclesiastical abuses were removed. Within the Church, correction of abuses and wrongs took place. During this time, what became of the Friends of God? It is quite evident that for the next century, individuals, like the one described by St. Theresa, were known as "God's friends," but the fellowships took other forms such as the "Brothers of the Common Life" (there were also sisterhoods). In the late sixteenth century, the fellowships were doubtless absorbed either by Protestant groups or by the monastic orders of the Catholic Church.

In the lower Rhine-lands before 1400 there developed a new form of religious life known historically as *moderna devotio*. This term has been translated as "the new devotion" or "the Christian renaissance."⁵ As told in chapter eight, there is a direct relation between the Friends of God and this new movement through Ruysbroeck. The direct bearer of the ideas and ideals was Gerard Groote who was about thirty-five years old when he in company with John Cele, rector of the Cathedral School at Zwolle, visited Ruysbroeck in Groenendael.

Thomas à Kempis in his account *The Founders of the New Devotion*⁶ gave authentic details of Groote's active four years following his becoming a deacon at forty. He was a graduate of the University of Paris, had lectured for a while in Cologne, had lived as an ascetic in a monastery of which a former university friend was prior. At his own request he was made a deacon and not a priest. He became an itinerant preacher speaking to clergy and laity alike of their shortcomings, and teaching the way of

⁵ Hyma, Albert, *The Christian Renaissance*. A History of the "Devotio Moderna." See also Ernst Barnikol, *Die Brüder von Gemeinsamen Leben in Deutschland*.

⁶ Thomas à Kempis: *The Founders of the New Devotion; Being the Lives of Gerard Groote, Florentius Radewyns, and Their Followers*. Tr. into English by J. P. Arthur.

salvation to every person who would listen. Wherever he preached, groups or fellowships developed for study and teaching and other service to their fellowmen.

In Deventer, Groote had twelve disciples. Among them was his successor in the movement, Florentius Radewyns, who at the time was a local vicar. In his home, group meetings were held, and poor students were given residence in exchange for their copying of manuscripts. Groote also gave the use of a house to "devout women," who wished without taking vows to live a religious life. He had drawn up rules whereby their wages could be combined and expenses shared. Opposition developed on the part of jealous clergy and some Dominicans on the one hand, and on the part of "free spirits" on the other. The plague claimed Groote four years after he was made deacon. It is generally thought that Groote at the suggestion of Florentius helped him to organize his household into a group leading the common life by sharing work and expenses. There were no vows but obedience to superiors and the common rules was expected. The members were to work with their hands and never be idle. Begging was forbidden. They were to take proper care of their bodies for the sake of the soul. Caring for the sick of the community was a main task. Groote became ill after caring for a friend who had the plague. In the statutes of the Brother-House of Herford (founded later) it was expressly stated as one of the purposes "to edify their neighbors in the purity of the true Christian faith and unity of the Mother—the holy Christian religion and worship."⁷

The number of centers of house-brothers practicing the new devotion increased slowly. Exercises for the cultivation of the inner life were prepared by one of the brothers, Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen. The treatise was called *Spiritual Ascensions*. In it he included an earlier writing of Radewyns. He added chapters on "the reformation of the faculties of the soul." Zerbolt died in 1398 and Radewyns two years later. There is no reason to doubt historical scholars who state that in the next decades thousands

⁷ Herzog, *Realencyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*. 3d ed., III.

of lay persons used the exercises, and further, that Ignatius Loyola when in Paris may have learned from some of the brothers there of the widespread use of "the exercises." In Loyola's well-known *Spiritual Exercises* are present the ideas that God must work in a prepared soul and that "the colloquy is made, properly speaking, just as one friend speaks to another."⁸

Because of determined opposition on the part of some clergy to the Brothers of the Common Life, there developed the idea of a retreat. As Dier, a chronicler, reports, "for this reason did they decide to build a monastery because they living the simple life were afraid of persecutions by rivals, and thus if some of them would be actually living in a monastery they would be protected."⁹ In 1386, two years after Gerard Groote's death, six brothers took vows and became the first members of the monastery at Windesheim. They adopted the Augustinian Canons Regular just as Ruysbroeck and his associates of the religious community at Groenendael had done. Later the increase in the number of monasteries made necessary annual meetings and some form of supervision and the term "Windesheim Congregations" came into use. Ruysbroeck's monastery became the center of such a congregation. The number of groups of "sisters of the common life" did not increase rapidly. Even so, some sisters became nuns, adopting the corresponding Augustinian Canons.

It is evident from careful records that from the movement *moderna devotio* developed two well organized movements, namely, the brotherhoods of the common life and the Windesheim congregations. They developed coöperatively. The monks and brothers were at home in either group. By 1424, half of the younger brothers had become rectors or priors. The Windesheim congregations were interested in reform within monastic life. The Brothers were devoted to reform of the life of the laity. The latter organization was not a free sect, nor was it like the Beg-

⁸ For possible relation between writings of Gerard Groote and of St. Ignatius see Watrigant: *La Genèse des exercices de St. Ignace* in *Études religieuses*, 71, 72, 73 (1887); or Watrigant, *La Methodique et l'École de la vie commune*, in "Revue d'ascétique et de mystique," Vol. III, also reference to same in Peers, E. Allison, *Studies of the Spanish Mystics*, I, 12.

⁹ Hyma, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

hards. It was more within the Church. Opposition on the part of some Dominican monks and secular clergy had won for the two groups endorsement by local bishops. The right of the brothers to lead a common life had been ably defended in a treatise by Gerard Zerbolt. The brothers at one time asked the Law faculty of the University of Cologne to give judgment on their organizations. The determined opposition complained about the whole movement to the Church Council of Constance. By 1419, both the brotherhoods and the congregations had papal sanction.¹⁰ By 1500 there were about a hundred monastic centers in the Lowlands, west of the Rhine centering around Münster, and throughout the Rhine valley. It was in the brotherhoods that the interests and activities of the Friends of God transmitted by Ruysbroeck and Groote were carried on.

The Brothers of the Common Life combined the activity of the inner and outer life quite in accord with the balanced life practiced by Ruysbroeck and the Friends of God. Reference has already been made to their use of spiritual exercises for themselves and others. Their schools belong to the history of education in Europe. John Cele, rector of the Cathedral School in Zwolle and great friend of Gerard Groote, was active in educational work for more than forty years. He prepared new texts, improved the old ones, found new methods of discipline. He expounded the Scriptures to the laity. The taking of poor students into the homes of the Brothers developed into the opening of regular dormitories. Also, wealthy and devout burghers were asked to take younger students into their family life. Lambert van Galen and Bye van Dunen in Deventer, for examples, each took eight boys whom the Brothers selected. About 1400, these dormitories had become schools (secondary) for students too poor to attend the established schools. Records tell of an attendance of one to two thousand. Names of well-known religious and educational leaders are connected with the schools, such as Thomas à Kempis, Nicholas of Cusa, Gansfort, Standonck, Mombaer, Alexander Hegius, John Sturm, Calvin, and Luther who attended a school at Magde-

¹⁰ Herzog, *Realencyklopädie für Prot. Theol. und Kirche*. 3d ed. Vol. III, art. by L. Schulze.

burg. In 1532, Luther wrote to the rector at Herford—"If all things were in as good condition as the brethren house, the Church would be much too blessed in this life." The Brothers in Marburg associated themselves with the Dominicans and opposed the Reformation. At that time there were but eight brothers. Many of the schools survived the storms of the Reformation; some were taken over by the Jesuits.

There are three prominent men in the fifteenth century connected with the Friends of God of the fourteenth, namely, Thomas à Kempis, John Gerson, and Nicholas of Cusa.

Thomas à Kempis had an elder brother John in Windesheim. In 1392 Thomas had visited Radewyns; later he became an Augustinian monk and lived as is well known in the monastery of St. Agnes, one of the Windesheim Congregation. In *The Imitation of Christ* (whether compilation or not) are many ideas akin to those in the *Gottesfreund-literatur*.¹¹ The friendship idea is found in all three books of *The Imitation of Christ*, only it is more Christocentric than the friendship ideas used by Eckhart, Tauler, Suso, and Ruysbroeck. The popularity of the writing is indicated by the number of manuscripts; over four hundred are in existence. Over half of these are in German, but translations were made into French, Italian, Flemish, and Dutch. The following quotations are illustrative of the friendship idea:

The Saints and Friends of Christ served the Lord in hunger and thirst. . . . They were strangers to the world but near and familiar friends to God (I, 18). Whereas [in contrast to men relishing nothing but carnal things] the Saints of God and all the devout Friends of Christ regarded not those things which pleased the flesh. . . . If Jesus be not above all a friend to thee, thou shalt be sad and desolate (II, 8). If thou art willing to

¹¹ "The 'clarification' which the mysticism of the fourteenth century underwent in the fifteenth certainly related very especially to that aggressive intellectualism, so that the piety which expressed itself for example, in the famous book *De imitatione Christi* (Thomas à Kempis) may be described as essentially Bernardine without Neoplatonic admixture, but yet only as Bernardine. A new powerful element of joy in God, who forgives sin, and bestows faith, is sought in vain."—Harnack, *History of Dogma*, VI, 101n.

suffer no adversity, how wilt thou be the friend of Christ (II, 1). He that can best tell how to suffer, will best keep himself in peace: that man is conqueror of himself and lord of the world, the friend of Christ, and heir of heaven (II, 3).¹²

In the Fourth Book, "concerning the sacrament," Moses is named as "thy great servant and thine especial friend . . ." and "here in the Sacrament of the Altar, Thou art wholly present, my God, the man Christ Jesus; how faithful a Friend do they welcome! how lovely and noble a Bridegroom do they embrace . . . in like manner thou [the person] ought also to offer thyself willingly unto Me every day in the Holy Communion . . . that Thou alone mayest speak unto me, and I unto Thee as the beloved is wont to speak to his beloved and friend feast with friend." Sometimes *The Imitation of Christ* is said to reflect the helplessness and worthlessness of man. But certainly the last quotations imply a mutuality between God and the soul rather than a chasm. It is true that this book is almost wholly concerned with inner experiences as contrasted to the teachings of Tauler which emphasizes relationship with one's fellowmen.

In the chapter on Ruysbroeck, reference was made to the criticism made by John Gerson (1363-1429) of Ruysbroeck's *The Adornment of Spiritual Marriage*. Gerson, successor of Peter D'Ailly as chancellor of the University of Paris, being a traditionalist in theology, attacked some of the teachings of Ruysbroeck as extreme and pantheistic in speculation. Some of Ruysbroeck's associates replied quite ably. In a letter which Gerson wrote to the Carthusian Bartholomaeus before 1406, he explains that "according to a previous judgment of mine, the two first parts of the book are fairly useful. I found nothing in them contrary to faith and pure morality." But the third part of the book is to be avoided, and reasons were given. Gerson thought that Ruysbroeck belonged to the Beghards. And he had read the book in translation.¹³ It is of interest that the great chancellor who was prominent in helping to close "the great schism" was himself not free from criticism on the part of church officials who objected to his hearing confessions of the students. Gerson was

¹² Quoted from the edition in "Collins Illustrated Pocket Classics."

¹³ See letter in Oehl, *Deutsche Mystiker Briefe*, p. 450.

not a priest. He defended himself by saying that "youth were to be heard and loved. Where was there a wiser place to begin than at the University of Paris from which the students (*parvuli*) would scatter through the whole of Christendom and become the teachers of others?"¹⁴ This great master also interested himself in teaching the children of the poor. He wrote an *A B C for Little People*, and gained the popular title "Doctor of the people and Doctor of little children."¹⁵ In this relation to the common people, Gerson resembles most the Friends of God.

Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), bishop and later a cardinal, was interested in the success of the Brothers of the Common Life, and even more in the reforming zeal of the Windesheim Congregations. About 1450 he visited the Windesheim Congregation. He gave to the school at Deventer a *stipendium* for students from his home place. His connection with the Friends of God is even more direct. Though a humanist in many of his interests, he was also a mystic in his "untiring zeal for the Inexpressible" and his great joy in finding the term *docta ignorantia*, and so on. Johannes Wenck of the University of Heidelberg accused Nicholas of the heresy of pantheism which he said was like that of Eckhart. Nicholas of Cusa defended both himself and Eckhart in 1449 in *Apologia doctae ignorantiae*.¹⁶

In a study of the Friends of God it is necessary to answer the question as to whether or not they were forerunners of the Protestant Reformation. They were, and they were not. They were forerunners in that they belonged actively to the preceding centuries when many factors contributed to the disintegration of the social control of the Church. The many brotherhoods, not to mention the free sects, had developed throughout Western Europe. These brotherhoods "while not hostile to the Church served in no small degree as substitutes for it, and many Christians found their religious needs largely met and satisfied by them."¹⁷ But Friends of God were consciously within the Church and obedient to its regulation. They were at times surprised and again indifferent

¹⁴ Quoted from Geffcken, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

¹⁵ Jones, R. M., *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 306.

¹⁶ One of the best Latin texts of Eckhart's writings belonged to Nicholas. See Oehl, *Mystiker Briefe*, p. 538.

¹⁷ McGiffert, A. C., *Protestant Thought before Kant*, p. 15.

to the name "heretic" when applied to themselves. They made earnest efforts, as has been told, to check the extravagant Free Spirits of their day. It is true that they, following Meister Eckhart, did much of their teaching in German and to the laity. The groups were more like modern church societies than heretical groups. They were primarily reformers of the inner life of men. It is the individualism inherent in their teaching concerning God within the soul of every man that has direct relation to the element of freedom in the Protestant Reformation.¹⁸

Luther's interest in the little book *Theologia Germanica* and his enthusiasm for Tauler have been told of in an earlier chapter. His copy of Tauler's sermons (discovered in Zwickau in 1889) shows careful reading.¹⁹ Luther doubtless came "into possession of Tauler's sermons about 1515 for in his *Commentary on Romans*, finished in 1516, he speaks of Tauler who explained better than others in the German language how God works in man's heart.²⁰ From *Theologia Germanica* Luther declared he learned "more of what God and Christ and man are" than from any other book except the Bible and from Saint Augustine.

There are a number of contemporaries of Luther who are little known but who knew the writings of the Friends of God very well indeed. They were men like Hans Denck of Bavaria, a school-master; Bunderlin and Entfelder, "two prophets of the inward word"; Sebastian Franck, "an apostle of inward religion"; Schwenckfeld, Sebastian Costello, Valentine Weigel, and others. Weigel edited *Theologia Germanica*, calling it "a precious little book" and "a noble book." He treasured also the sermons of Tau-

¹⁸ In the religious awakening of the individual, Harnack finds "the highest significance of the Mendicant Order movement. In this sense the Orders were a prior stage of the Reformation." Harnack, *op. cit.*, p. 96. It must be remembered that the leaders of the *Gottesfreunde* were Dominicans.

¹⁹ See Weimar edition of Luther's Works, Vol. IX, for editing of Luther's marginal notes, by Buchwald.

²⁰ Jones, R. M., *Some Exponents of Mystical Religion*, p. 124. Rufus Jones says of the influence of the Friends of God on Luther that "we are now able to establish beyond debate or controversy that his study of the mystics marks the turning point of his life and actually swung him from the straight path of a medieval monk to the incalculable curve of a dynamic reformer."

ler. "Man must seek, find, and know God through an interrelation; he must find God in himself and himself in God" is Sebastian Franck's way of stating the idea most common to these "spiritual reformers" of the sixteenth century.²¹

In the same century there was determined opposition on the part of some Church officials to the *Gottesfreund-literatur*. Melchior Cana, authority in the Spanish Inquisition proceedings, expressed himself with much feeling on the matter of mysteries (which belong to the knowledge of the priests) being given to women and uneducated lay persons. He said that one could not maintain reverence for religion without mysteries and that there were no mysteries where there were no secrets; that Tauler has endorsed a sect and his teachings were harmful. Twenty years earlier Johannes Eck had called Tauler "a dreamer and suspected heretic." In 1576, the General of the Jesuit Order forbade the use of certain books, naming Tauler, Ruysbroeck, Henry Suso. On the *Index of Forbidden Books of Sixtus V* (1590), Tauler's writings appear, probably because the Spanish list was copied, or because of personal antipathy of the Pope to Tauler's ideas.²² In the year 1603, the Index Congregation was busy expurgating the writings of Tauler and Savonarola. At this time the Pope asked the German emperor to send scholars to help, because the language of Tauler and other German religious was unknown in Rome. There were churchmen like Ludovicus Blosius and Possevin who defended Tauler's writings.

In closing the historical study of the Friends of God and other practical mystics like the Brothers of the Common Life and the monks of the Windesheim Congregation, one cannot help but be impressed with their religious strength and fortitude. They were seemingly undaunted by the confused, chaotic times in which they lived. The claim made by Charles A. Bennett in his recent study that "the mystic alone can read the black book of pessimism to the end, barking none of the world's tragedy and chaos" seems justified. He gave as the reason for the mystic's fortitude his consciousness of being "the common ally of that by which the evil

²¹ For further accounts of these leaders see Jones, Rufus M., *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th centuries*.

²² Reusch, *Der Index der Verbotenen Bücher* Vol. I.

may be conquered." For the Friends of God of the late Middle Ages, it was without doubt their consciousness of the friendship of God and His need of them as loving individuals to help in the redemption of mankind that gave them fortitude and a positive if not optimistic outlook on the world. All things were in God, "the Eternal Now." The Friends of God were really monotheists and they had closed for themselves the usual gap between the Creator and creature by their active belief in God-within the depths of the soul of each individual, and belief in the presence of "the spark" whereby the soul could be "oned with one One."²³

Bennett also speaks of the mystic as "at once the democrat and the pioneer of the religious life; the democrat because he believes that any individual may receive revelation; the pioneer because he believes in exploring the problems of his destiny for himself."²⁴ Surely the Friends of God of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries can be called democrats because of their successful efforts to bridge the gap between clergy and laity. They succeeded so well that there is very evident a certain loss of refinement in the ideas and ideals as expressed in some of the anonymous writings. They transmitted the ideas of the scholars to the common people. It is what Germans call the *Verbürgerlichung* of ideas—that is, what happens to ideas when the burghers take them as their own. In the modern era we talk of the mediocrity of democratic ideas. Furthermore, the Friends of God from Eckhart on were surely pioneers in the realm of working out their own destinies, for their teachings concerned primarily the salvation of the individual. They were experimentalists in the realm of applied psychology though they knew it not. Brief as was their appearance in history, the Friends of God were in their times "constructors of life." They loved and served their neighbors. They loved their enemies. At the close of their story one can well be encouraged to believe that simple, honest, and thoughtful persons who follow religious leaders consecrated to ideas of universal application and value can in their day be successful pioneers in a spiritual and social enterprise.

²³ "In this hot forcing-house of thought, religion was not really matured, but the Medieval Man had his sense of self-importance awakened." Harnack, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

²⁴ Bennett, Charles A., *A Philosophical Study of Mysticism*, p. 162; 175.

CHAPTER X

LASTING INFLUENCE AND IDEAS OF GOD'S FRIENDS

In concluding the study of the Dominican monks and nuns, Beghards and Beguines, merchants and their wives, princesses, spinsters, clergy, farmers, cobblers, and others historically known as Friends of God, there remains the consideration of their lasting influence, and the recurrence of their ideas in the history of philosophy and religion. The Friends of God have not been presented as great knowers or great lovers, but rather as human beings who individually and in fellowships were extraordinary in the combination of what they knew and how they loved. Furthermore, it is the story of persons and groups who possessing certain religious ideas were possessed by them, with the result that they demonstrated a manner of living and a way of life which history knows as a type of practical mysticism.

The story of the Friends of God of the fourteenth century is one of individuals and groups whose teachings and lives stand out most clearly about the middle of the century when the Black Death ravaged European populations. Men and women were called "God's friends" in other ages and lands but in the Rhine valley at the beginning of the fourteenth century, there was the unique figure of Meister Eckhart in whose teachings the idea of mutual friendly relation between God and man was basic. His followers, the Dominicans, John Tauler, zealous preacher and beloved father of the Friends of God, and Henry Suso, "servitor of Wisdom" and lover of the very persons who persecuted him, taught the same idea on simpler levels and in more practical ways. In their marked differences in temperament and activities, the effectiveness of the idea of friendship with God in men's lives may be studied. If one places immediately beside these two leaders, the "Friend of God of the Oberland," one glimpses the effect of the ideas

and ideals on the laity, many of whom were tertiaries of the mendicant orders. Granted that the gifted Strassburg merchant, Rulman Merswin, or someone like him created the great unknown Friend of God, the influence of this unknown person cannot be discussed merely as a fascinating myth. Merswin's books and many fragmentary writings by others are rightly considered tendency-literature, in that as the treasured possessions of common folk they reveal deep currents of life. It may be that in the troubled times the ideas and religious practices served as anchors to persons seeking some permanent security or value. The little treatise *A German Theology*, prepared by an unnamed Friend of God, gathered the ideas and ideals prevalent among the religious and left in concise form much that Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso had taught. The other leaders, Henry of Nördlingen and the devout Margaret Ebner, the more robust Christine Ebner, Adelaide Langman, and still others like Margaret-of-the-Golden Ring become very real human beings as found even in the scattered records.

The ideas and ideals of God's friends were practised also by groups of Christians, notably in Basel and Strassburg. Literary fragments give evidence of communication between groups widely scattered. These groups were concerned with the spiritual growth of their individual selves and with helping their fellowmen and averting for their sakes the impending doom. The apocalyptic strain in lay writings gave details of sins of individual clergy and laity even more than visions of days to come. It was, however, from the teachings of John Ruysbroeck, the contemporary Flemish mystic, that there went out a direct influence shifting the interest of God's friends as well as of pious folk generally to a greater "this-worldliness" in thought and service. Historically the Brothers of the Common Life in their schools for sons of laymen and their zeal for moral reform of the life of the religious followed, at least in the Rhine valley, from the activities of Gerard Groote, a disciple of Ruysbroeck.

From Ruysbroeck's influence there arose two trends in religious life and thought; the one tended toward the practical, as already told and the other led to *moderna devotio* whose adherents were interested in "spiritual exercises." The Windesheim Congregation

expressed both reforming zeal within the religious orders and religious fervor in achieving the imitation of Christ. Thomas à Kempis lived and worked within the Order.

Thus, the close of the fourteenth century witnessed the possession by "the giant people" of religious truths and practices formerly more confined within established orders and ceremonies of the Church. Great numbers of individuals discussed the why and wherefore of the ways of life in which they found themselves insecure and distressed. Hence when the Friends of God demonstrated, about the middle of the century, a simple and direct sense of confidence in life (faith), of self-direction (purpose and hope), and of service (love), their way of living was bound to recommend itself to many.

Two main ideas stood out above others in their teachings, namely, 1) the reality of God-in-man, i.e., in the ground of each man's inner self; and 2) the potential growth of every individual toward perfection of character and ultimate union with God. These ideas were further identified with the birth, teaching, and sufferings of Jesus, so that He became "the door" to the rebirth of the soul of the individual. But the chief concern was individual rebirth through Him, rather than the imitation of Christ.

The Friends of God of the fourteenth century were distinguished not so much by the originality of their ideas, ideals, and conduct, as in the unique combination of the three.

In their everyday living, *Gottesfreunde* were marked by their respect for honest labor and a sense of vocation for each man. To Tauler,

every art and every work however small are used by the same Spirit to the service and benefit of men. One can spin, another make shoes. . . . Know if I were not a priest and in an Order, I would consider it as something great if I could make shoes! I would gladly earn my bread with my hands.¹

Ecstasy to the Friends was not an end in itself but often led directly to social action. As from moments of ecstasy, so from their visions, there were often practical results in service to one's neighbors. In ascetic practices, they made preparation for be-

¹ Lehman, *Tauler*, I, 187.

coming God's personal intimates. With the exception of Suso, we have no records of excessive ascetic practices on the part of the leaders. Ascetic practices belonged "to the beginning person." Freedom was attained with growth in the spiritual life. As to the veneration of relics the Friends, with the exception of Henry of Nördlingen showed general indifference. There is great vitality in Meister Eckhart's call to his listeners,

My people, why seek ye after dead bones? Why seek ye not after living holiness which might give you everlasting life? The dead can neither give nor take away.—Pfeiffer, *Eckhart*, p. 579.

It should also be pointed out that the middle temperate way of the Friends of God could well seem ascetic or be called so, in contrast to the marked extravagances in clothes and entertainments which reached a great height in Western Europe between 1350 and 1450. But the imitation of the poverty of Jesus was to the Friends of God first of all an inner experience.

With the exception of Suso, "the agonist," the Friends of God seem to have maintained a predominant cheerfulness of disposition or mood. "Melancholy is a hindrance in striving toward the Good," says Tauler quite definitely. He also speaks of "inner singing" as preferable to "outer," if one cannot do both. His use of humor in preaching must have enlivened many a dull hour for his listeners. The great Meister Eckhart had urged Christians to be of "an uplifted and not a downcast nature (*Gemüt*) ; a burning nature steeped in empty silent stillness" (a paradox common in mystical experience). In all the material concerning *Gottesfreunde* there can be found evidence for thinking that they showed graciousness in their ways of living. This certainly was a practical contribution to the harsh times in which they lived.

The social relationship of the Friends of God to their fellow-men has been emphasized throughout the story in order to show the practicableness of the mystical ideas, and to furnish points for a clear impression of the temperate way or balanced life ideal. This balanced life ideal, it must be remembered, was practiced in "the wildest of centuries."

In the process of growth, God's Friends marked as characteristic of a beginning person what was called a gathering (*Sammlung*)

of self. This was not original with them except that common folk now endeavored to achieve it. The way to integration of self as taught and practiced was somewhat as follows: No one on earth is responsible for you but you yourself. Know yourself. Turn within. Withdraw from too many activities and great dependence on creaturely things. "Learn to conquer one vice after another and keep at it." Distinguish between outer and inner self; between the lower and higher powers of your own soul. Choose with singleness of will to use the higher powers. Do not begin today, and leave off tomorrow this inwardness. Then forget yourself. "Plunge into your Nothing" without much seeking or questioning. Truth is acquired not with much questioning according to Suso but "with true patience and self-abnegation." Seek only God within the ground of your soul, and you will be found with God and be a new person, combining successfully the outer and inner life.

The three stages in the process of integration were evidently 1) renunciation of self, 2) rebirth, 3) continuous growth toward perfection. They spoke of "beginning persons" and of perfected persons "who become by grace what God is naturally (not many attain to this height in this lifetime)." All are Friends of God from the beginning person to the perfected one. In connection with the process they spoke of purification, of enlightenment, and of union with God or with Christ as a possible and practical achievement in the everyday world. The discipline of this way to attain to the place where God can work in the soul is known to be severe. But "there is no mountain so sunny and peaceful but that one must become weary in climbing it," said Tauler. Often one climbs in shadows and in dryness of spirit but the purpose in climbing (disinterested whole-souled love of God) sustains him in the continuous effort. When the summit (of the soul) is reached, God works unceasingly. Before one arrives, He is there.

The new person was an enlarged self. The idea underlying this possibility was that God having left something of Himself in the "naked ground" of the soul, could and would meet the gathered self who persisted to final renunciation of this gathered self, in order that the birth of God in the soul would issue as an en-

larged self. In chapter six there was given a summary of "the spark" treatise. In it is found the idea that "out of a created-as-an-animal person" a God-seeing, loving, heavenly person can grow.

One need not be surprised at the amazing sense of certainty and authority manifested by persons who have had such an experience of rebirth. Unknown, they claim to "know the world"—"the Friends of God turn over heaven and earth and read therein the surpassing wonders of God." They possess inner peace. "Inner light" directs them as to what to do, for what to pray, or what to preach. Understanding (*Verstand*) and intuitive wisdom (*fühlende Weisheit*) are gifts of God. Masters may argue as to whether love or knowledge (*Erkenntniss*) is the higher. "This," says Tauler, "we leave aside. In this there is no doubt. Love is far more useful than knowledge. Love can go where knowledge must stay out." Along with this sure knowledge and love, the Friends of God practiced true humility. They are often described as having no unusual ways about them.

The new person was a universalized self. Besides the wisdom beyond all knowing and the love which could pierce through to apprehension of God Himself, the Friends of God as conscious sons of God growing in intimacy with Christ and God, became saviors of men as Jesus had been Savior. They constantly prayed for all Christendom and endeavored thereby to postpone what seemed to them the inevitable awful day of God's anger. They had no idea of escaping the common suffering or approaching doom if it should come.

It is in place here to recall the three kinds of dying which many Friends of God contemplated as ideals. The first dying for others was because of the foolishness and weakness of others; another dying occurred because of hostility (from the very persons for whom one would die); and the third dying was "to be crucified on their behalf." "The gift above all gifts was to give one's life for others."—Anonymous. "Eternal life follows every death," says Tauler.

The way of salvation which they taught was open to all persons. Outwardly many happenings and things may direct one to God. Inwardly for each person the way of salvation means three changes,

namely, "to be freed from all that belongs to creatures; to be formed with Christ into His likeness; and to be reformed in the Godhead which is to be perfected or united as "one with One." This union may not be completed in this world but it is assured to the one in whom God bears His Son.

The note of man's helplessness is sounded very little in the writings of the Friends of God. It is more often the thought of rising, withdrawing, entering, and preparing, that is prominent. Love is the controlling power. Because of love for God the essential experience of complete self-abnegation is sought and with the help of the spirit this "cross" is attained so that God may enter and act in the whole life of the individual. The difference in individuals lies in the difference of their response to God. As Ruysbroeck says, "Because of the inequality of their adherence and exercises, I call some the faithful servants of God, and others, I call His secret friends, and others again, His hidden sons."

Whether the Friends of God of the fourteenth century were heretics or not, dissenters or not, cannot be told in one sentence. It is quite clear that they thought of themselves as within the Mother Church. Their ideas and ideals certainly were Scriptural and dominantly Augustinian in content. Restless and discontented groups such as "the free spirits" were among the people who heard them preach with enthusiasm. There were what might be called "border groups" who were neither within or without the Church. Many individual Beghards and Beguines described in this study as related to the individuals or groups of God's friends became tertiaries of the regular orders before the close of the century. Without question, however, the emphasis on "as many ways to God as men," on inner poverty rather than outer for the laity, and on the possible growth of each person toward individual union with God caused individuals to respect self. Thus the way of individuals to revolt against institutions and class distinctions was doubtless opened among the German peoples.

Whether or not the Friends of God were forerunners of the Reformation in more than the emphasis on individual worth has been considered in the preceding chapter. It is well to repeat for sake of emphasis that in the teachings of zealous Dominican monks

and nuns, there was the germ, for the German people at least, of the idea of universal priesthood. And to the pious examples as well as writings of these same Friends of God can be traced a source for the widespread, almost collective habit of devotional life carried on directly by simple folk in town and country. It gave rise to a piety but loosely related to ecclesiastical control.

The ideas held by the Friends of God were not confined even in the fourteenth century to groups in the German provinces. St. Bridgit (Brigitta) of Sweden was a contemporary religious leader of great vigor. In chapter two above reference was made to her use of the term "friend of God." Many of the ideas of St. Catherine of Siena who died in 1380 (when only thirty-three years old) parallel those of Tauler and Suso. She too prays for her neighbors asking God to let her bear punishment for their sins. Her soul experienced a union with God more perfect than the union of her body with her soul (*Dialogues*, XIX, 57). As long as persons are pilgrims in this life, they are capable of growth, and "he who does not go forward, by that very fact is turning back." "God created you without yourselves, but He will not save you without yourselves." St. Catherine is also explicit in her directions as to "how a man may know if he has become a friend of God."

The contemporary English mystics are very interesting. Like the Friends of God they were more practical than speculative in thought. There was the layman Richard Rolle who died in 1349, who upon his conversion became a hermit much as Rulman Merswin did when he retired from the monastic center at Groenenworth. Rolle not only wrote but he wandered from place to place preaching and stirring others to love God and their fellowmen. He is described by Evelyn Underhill as "an exacting moralist." Then there was Walter Hilton, an Augustinian canon at the time of the Wyclif controversies. As a pastor he worked out ideas similar to those of God's friends. Lady Juliana of Norwich belongs in this century. She is mentioned here primarily to indicate the existence of *Frauen-mystik* in England as well as on the Continent. Then there is the anonymous writer of *The Cloud of Unknowing* who seems most like his German contemporaries. He advises one,

To swink and sweat in all that thou canst and mayest for to get thee a true knowing and a feeling of thyself as thou art; and then I trow that soon after that thou shalt have a true knowing and feeling of God as He is.²

It is delightful to read his pleading that "for God's love be wary with sickness . . . so that thou be not the cause of thy feebleness. For I tell thee truly that this work [spiritual growth] asketh a full restfulness, and a full whole and clean disposition as well in body as in soul." In God's school, the way is hard and straight at the beginning; but right after a true feeling cometh a true knowing. The author speaks of "the body and the soul, the which is the manhood" as "oned with the Godhead without departing," and towards the close of the short writing he speaks of "young fools who ween oftentimes that God is their enemy when He is their full friend." These English mystics—layman, theologian, "educated gentlewoman," anonymous writer—indicate a range of religious persons similar to the diversity found among the Friends of God of the Rhine valley.

The question naturally arises, if the ideas of the Friends of God are not confined to one land or one age, why should Eckhart, Tauler, Suso, and the others, be considered by so many to be uniquely German? The enthusiasm of German historians for Meister Eckhart as "the father" of this and that phase of German thought and religion was stated in chapter three above. It will be remembered that Eckhart was not the very first to preach in the vernacular. It is fairly clear, however, that he was one of the first Germans to take the scholastic ideas usually expressed in Latin and painstakingly to press them into the German of his listeners. Suso wrote both in Latin and German but as a teacher he preferred the latter. Tauler, knowing Latin, seldom used it in his preaching. The love letters exchanged between Margaret Ebner and Heinrich von Nördlingen are among the first German personal letters which are extant.

As was said before, Meister Eckhart and his followers may not have added an original idea to speculative thought. It was rather the daring quality of Eckhart's thinking combined with desire to

² *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Edited by Evelyn Underhill (John M. Watkins, London, 1922).

unite himself with God which is treasured by the Germans as unique. He seems like an eagle to them in "the flying power" of his thought. It is interesting to find "this flying power" reflected in an old Faust book published in Frankfort in 1587. In it is the account of a student, a peasant's son who "took to himself eagle's wings, and wished to explore all grounds in heaven and upon earth." In Goethe's *Faust*, there is the youth Euphorion who exclaims,

Higher must I climb, yet higher
Wider still must be my gaze

Not on moat or wall relying
On himself let each one rest!
Firmest stronghold all defying
Ever is man's iron breast.³

Faust himself after all his searchings when night closes in upon him and he is blind, can yet be sure that "within him shines a radiant light" and he hastens "to realize in act his thinking." The youth Euphorion's "firmest stronghold" and Faust's "inner light" closely resemble Meister Eckhart's statement that he would "cling to the Truth and leave God if perchance He were not the Truth."⁴ In the Sister Katrei story associated with Eckhart this is stated somewhat differently, "Not all the saints in heaven nor all the preaching friars and barefoot monks on earth can stand against one man moved by the Truth."⁵

To repeat in different words, there was in Meister Eckhart and the Friends of God of the fourteenth century a keenness of mind combined with something which was within, *ganz und gar innen*, and which made of them individuals with passion and endless devotion to know not only that which exists in the world but also all that is and is beyond Reason. They showed an undismayed energy in trying to do as Faust, i.e., "realize in act their thinking." They actually appear to be "constructors of life" in bridging two usual

³ From translation by Anna Swannick published by A. L. Burt Co.

⁴ Above chap. iii, footnote 3.

⁵ Quoted from Jones, Rufus, *Some Exponents of Mystical Religion*, p.

chasms, namely, the one between God and the soul of man, and the other between man and all creatures. This bridging of chasms is characteristic of later German philosophy and religion. The essential indwelling of God in man was expressed by Fichte. The oneness of God and nature and also of man and nature were emphasized by Schelling. The reconciliation of opposites in the speculative realm as by Hegel, and of opposites in nature, such as the good and the demoniacal elements, is a task to which German thinkers return again and again with endless patience. In the sixteenth century there was a marked combination of *natur philosophie* and *religiöse mystik*, of whom Paracelsus is probably the best known exponent.

In the last quarter of the sixteenth century and the first of the next, there lived a German cobbler and philosopher whose influence extended to England and beyond the seas. "I am only a layman." Boehme says, "yet I bring to light things which all the High Schools and Universities have been unable to do . . . so long as the hand of God stayeth upon me I understand." He, like the Friends of God, "reached the innermost Birth of the Deity. . . . A Christian is a new Creature in the ground of the heart." To Boehme, Christ was more the way of salvation than He was to "God's friends"; but as in their searchings, "The individual soul," says Boehme, "must go through Christ's whole journey and enter wholly into His process." Boehme gathered into his speculation and experience other strains of thought than this of divine possibilities in the soul of man common to the Friends of God. But in this strain of influence Boehme's indebtedness to a university graduate and life-long pastor, Valentine Weigel (1533-1588), is but little known, and Weigel's "spiritual conception of Christianity was formed and fed by the sermons of Tauler, and by that little book, *The German Theology*."⁶

Lest the impression be left that only in Protestant thought can the ideas of the Friends of God be traced, reference must be made to Johann Scheffler, better known as Angelus Silesius. He was born, son of a Polish nobleman, in the year that Boehme died.

⁶ Jones, Rufus, *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, p. 141.

In 1661 Scheffler entered the Roman Catholic Church as a Franciscan friar. His *Divine Epigrams* and his *Aus dem cherubimischen Wandersmann* show striking resemblance to ideas common to the Friends of God. The ideas concerning Godhead, God, divine poverty, God's image in the soul, the deified person, spiritual marriage, ecstasy, and also the idea of God's friendship are all present.

A recent anthology of "religious poetry of the present" bears the title *Brücken zum Ewigen*⁷ (Bridges to the Eternal). In 1927 the second edition was published and the editor begins his preface with the statement, "Bridges to the eternal are more needed in this day than any other bridges. Our times stretch hands to the stars—to the immortal, to the above-reason, to the quite Other, to Beyond, the Eternal, to God." The "eagle flight" in exploring, as well as the flame of "God-within" the soul, is present in these modern poems.

Some of the present-day German thought shows a tendency toward *Grenz-überschreitung*, that is, going beyond limits or known boundaries. And modern German theologians seek even in the midst of social chaos Germany's mission not as a political entity but as a people in the building of the new world civilization. In their modern philosophic thinking German leaders stress facing the world of matter and events (*Sachlichkeit*) and the inner strength of mind and soul (*Innerlichkeit*) in much the same way as the Friends of God strove to unify the outer and inner life. When one endeavors to determine the underlying hypothesis or faith in this recurring characteristic trait of their thought, it appears to be one which asserts an essential unity of God and man.

There is another phase of the religious life of the Friends of God which is expressed by what Germans call *Gemütlichkeit*. It is a term which implies a congenial relationship between individual and groups, between inner and outer experiences of life—a harmony between subjective and objective selves expressing itself in satisfaction or enjoyment of living.

In German religious life there is also that which is called "the pietistic strain." Outwardly it probably had its rise in the extension

⁷ Knevels, Wilhelm, *Brücken zum Ewigen; die religiöse Dichtung der Gegenwart*. 2d ed.

of the devotional life of the monasteries to the common people. That the Friends of God had a share in this spread of piety among the laity has already been told. The greatest protagonist of German pietism was Philip Jacob Spener of the second half of the seventeenth century. He is known as a practical mystic combining an emphasis on inner and vital Christian life and right conduct and relations to one's fellowmen. Spener knew and recommended the writings of Tauler, Suso, *Theologia Germanica*, and Ruysbroeck to the laity. It is of special interest that under Pastor Spener's influence lay groups or fellowships developed. They were known as *collegia pietatis* who met regularly for the purpose of studying the Scriptures and cultivating the spiritual life of the members. German leaders like Hamann, Herder, Jacobi, Goethe, Lessing, Schleiermacher, and others were influenced by the movement. Kant, though reaching toward rationalism, came from a pietistic household. To this very day, pietistic groups can be found in Germany. German art and music as well as philosophy and religion show very real and deep pietistic characteristics.

If one looks for mysticism emphasizing ideas related to those held by God's Friends in Oriental philosophy, a parallel in ideas and yet with a distinct difference has been drawn by Rudolf Otto in *West-Östliche Mystik* between Sankara and Meister Eckhart.⁸ Revealing studies could be made in comparing and contrasting the ideas of Eckhart with Laotzu, Chuantzu, and Moti. Even the specific idea expressed in the term friendship can be found in Eastern thought. The Hindu Chaitanya (1486-1534) of Bengal taught of three kinds of love for God; and perfect love was looking upon God as one's intimate friend.⁹

Then in Sūfism, which took its rise first probably in Kūfa in the ninth century A.D., the idea of friendship with God is especially prominent. In the Muslim Traditions there was a saying ascribed to the Prophet that "God had said whoever walks toward Me, I will run towards him." An early writer on Sūfism says that the Sūfis are "those who have fled from the face of man-

⁸ Otto, Rudolf, *West-Östliche Mystik—Vergleich und Unterscheidung zur Wesendeutung*. Tr.: *Mysticism, East and West* (Macmillan, 1932).

⁹ Das Gupta, *Hindu Mysticism; Six lectures*.

kind seeking intimacy with God." Their characteristic marks are renunciation, inner poverty, "the gift of tears," and service to others. They follow "a Path," the goal of which is union with the Divine who is Supreme Beauty and Light. They address God as Friend. Their leaders, like Dhū al-Nun who in his travels learned some truths from a negro slave girl, were spoken of as friends of God. And as Margaret Smith states in her *Studies in Early Mysticism*¹⁰ there seems to be clear evidence of a belief in a divine spark (*sirr*). A most striking specific resemblance is shown in the following lines quoted from Jala' lu'd Din (Mathnawi Bk. 1, Tale V):

To trust in God and yet put forth our utmost skill
The surest method is to work His holy will
The friend of God must work.

.
The Prophet cries with a loud voice
Trust in God, yet tie the camel's leg.
Hear the adage, the worker is the friend of God.
Trust in Providence, but neglect not to use means.¹¹

These few illustrations of similar speculation and the use of the term "friend of God" in lands far removed from Germany are added to this study to emphasize the fact that the ideas which the Friends of God held are not confined to one continent or one age. As the Strassburg layman Rulman Merswin wrote in his *Book of Nine Rocks*, "Whoever does not believe that God can work His wonderful works through His friends today, that man is not a Christian for he does not believe that the Divine Power remains the same throughout the centuries."

It is hoped that this study of the Friends of God of the fourteenth century has shown them to be men and women of their times, and yet not of their times; or to say it differently, their manner of living and way of salvation in their times demonstrated universal elements which appear "the same throughout the centuries." One of the chief sources of the idea of God's friend-

¹⁰ Smith, Margaret, *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East*, p. 199; also p. 250.

¹¹ Quoted from Sell, Canon, *Studies in Islam*, p. 37.

ship in the Christian tradition extolled the Wisdom which caused men to be *God's friends and prophets*. Great prophets stand in reality. That "the friends of God must work," as quoted above from the Persian poet, testifies to the practical side of their religious experience and at the same time expresses one of the "bridges to the eternal" in the term "Friends of God." It was the close combination between high religious thinking and vigorous moral strength, the readiness alike for contemplation and action, the union of religious experience and tempered ways and social service—the apparent successful demonstration of all these by simple folk that first impelled the writer to make this study of the Friends of God of the Rhine valley. Of equal interest were 1) the sense of individual freedom in persons who found ultimate spiritual authority within the individual mind and heart, and 2) the extra vitality and energy manifested by religious persons who are single-minded and single-hearted.

At the close of the first chapter on "The Troubled Times," the question arose as to whether or not chaotic times tend to create groups centering around leaders of spiritual insight, especially if they show zealous convictions concerning the worth and dignity of man and convictions concerning the possibility of understanding the world of outer happenings. Without "the mystic constellation of the three stars," Meister Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso, the idea of friendship with God and of essential unity between God and man would certainly not have found expression in the group life of the Friends of God of the Rhine valley. The laity were the lesser mystics who clustered in a kind of pleiades, as Delacroix calls them. This transmission of light in the sense of spiritual knowledge would not have occurred except for the zeal of the leaders in finding "the works and ways" to make the truth which they experienced known to others. The turmoil and confusion in life owing to wars and stubborn antagonism between Church and the growing nations combined with the prevalence of plague created a situation in which some individuals were willing to go "a hundred miles" to search out a Friend of God and submit their lives to his direction.

Finally, for these confused if not chaotic modern times, this study

of the Friends of God of the fourteenth century has some telling values as to the relation of the individual to the group and the value of religious experience in social reconstruction. Related, though in a very small way, to the purpose of Dante in writing his superb drama of life and death is the hope of the writer that this historical study may reveal some wisdom for everyday living to seekers of Truth. That one may find Friends of God today in our midst is very probable, for, as in the fourteenth century, they remain as a rule unknown to the world, though knowing the world. With vision of the relation of God and His creatures, they proclaim the worth of the individual man. With fortitude and patient persistence, they serve and save their fellowmen. They may be, all unaware, the saving remnant in this present world situation.

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Then, too, the history of the identification of the manuscripts and their authorship had to be read in order to determine which editors to follow; as a result of this study, the writings of the fourteenth century German mystics edited by Franz Pfeiffer, were chosen in preference to those edited by Wilhelm Preger. The records of the long search and dispute concerning the identity of "the great unknown Friend of God" were good reading and the French scholar, Auguste Jundt, and the modern German scholar, Philip Strauch, were selected as authorities. The work of the Dominican scholar, Heinrich Suso Denifle, because of his discovery of the Latin writings of Eckhart, because of his persistent work in freeing John Tauler from the biographical implications of *Das Meister Buch*, and because of his personal devotion to Suso, whose name he bore, was given precedence over the work of other editors. In the bibliography the books preferred in preparation for each chapter are marked with asterisks.

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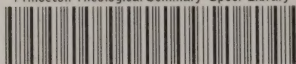
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